

**Between Two Homes: On the Lives and Identities of  
Transnational Pakistani Women in Hong Kong**

**SO, Fun Hang**

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**Submitted by: So Fun Hang**

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Many Hong Kong Pakistani women have transnational connections with their relatives in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. Some travel back and forth between Hong Kong and Pakistan. Most of them have low socioeconomic status in Hong Kong, while they enjoy middle-class status in Pakistan. This research focuses on how these Pakistani women present their identities similarly or differently when they are in Hong Kong or in Pakistan, and how they conceive of who they are between the two societies.

Based on my fieldwork accompanying Pakistani women back to Pakistan from Hong Kong, I found that these women face tension between their homes in these two places. These tensions are reflected by the changing performances of these women in front of their different audiences. For example, my informants insist on maintaining their Pakistani identity and Muslim image when they are in front of Hong Kong Chinese. However, they tend to show that they are cosmopolitan and independent women by wearing Western clothes or investing in land and property in Pakistan.

Thus, these women change their behaviors based on their differing situations in Pakistan and Hong Kong. In this thesis I show how they live in two places, view their homes, and shift their Hong Kong and Pakistani identities within their different social worlds.

**內容提要**

在香港，很多巴基斯坦女性和巴基斯坦保持緊密聯繫，有部分巴基斯坦女性更時常往返香港和巴基斯坦。在香港，大部分巴基斯坦婦女社會地位低，但她們回國後就成為中產階層人士。本文旨在研究這些巴基斯坦女性在不同的地方生活時，如何看待自己的身份、及在兩地表現身份的方式有什麼相同和相異之處。

在陪同巴基斯坦女性回國時，我發現她們在面對兩個家園時，身份矛盾。這些婦女在不同的受眾面前表現不同。例如，我的受訪者在香港人面前堅持維護他們的巴基斯坦身份和穆斯林的形像。然而，通過她們在巴基斯坦穿著的衣著或投資於土地和房產，我發現她們希望成為大都會和獨立的婦女。

因此，這些巴基斯坦婦女按照各自不同的情況改變表現。在這篇論文中，我闡述她們如何生活在兩個地方，她們如何看待她們的家，和她們在香港和巴基斯坦及不同的社會情境中如何變換身份。



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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This research examines the lives of Pakistani women in Hong Kong and their transnational lives between Hong Kong and Pakistan while highlighting their sense of home and identity. The life experience of Pakistani women is very different in Hong Kong compared to Pakistan. On the one hand, Pakistanis are a minority group in a cosmopolitan Chinese society like Hong Kong, where folk beliefs seems to be more dominant than monotheistic beliefs. Also, voices for having gender equality are getting stronger, with the roles of men and women overlapping both at home and in the workplace. In Pakistan, on the other hand, Pakistanis pay a great deal of attention to Islamic practices, with men and women playing distinctive roles. Pakistani men work outside the home while Pakistani women take care of the domestic sphere.

Pakistanis, similar to Hong Kong Chinese, experience British colonialism or at least the impact of British colonization. It is possible that there is a similar racial and social-economic hierarchy in their minds: Caucasians are of the highest social status among all ethnic groups while the people of darker skin color and lower class are ranked in the bottom of the racial hierarchy. This is why Pakistanis may agree with the racial hierarchy in Hong Kong. In Pakistan, the refugees or new immigrants from Afghanistan are racially discriminated against by the Pakistanis (Weiss 2006:158). When they come to Hong Kong, they also find that the new immigrants from mainland China are racially discriminated against by the Hong Kong Chinese. Pakistanis seem to agree that these mainland Chinese are less “civilized” and “educated” than Hong Kong Chinese.

A number of scholars have studied Pakistani women in Hong Kong and many have studied Pakistani women in Pakistan, but none have studied Pakistani women in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. No scholars have followed Hong Kong Pakistani women to Pakistan and studied their lives in these two places. As Clifford writes in *Routes* (1997:32), "We need to know a great deal more about how women have traveled, and currently travel, in different traditions and histories". Watson (1977:2) also writes, "(I)t is impossible to gain a true picture of immigration as a process without investigating the people and their families on both sides". Thus, in order to fully understand Pakistani women in Hong Kong, it would also be good to study their lives in Pakistan. This research is important for understanding Pakistani women who live in both Hong Kong and Pakistan.

In the past, scholars usually studied migrants in their host countries. Increasingly, scholars today study migrants when they go back to their home countries, which is essential for understanding their transnational lives. These researchers show how migrants' lives in both host and home countries affect one another. Scholars also show that migrants who travel between their host and home countries usually have their views on their class, gender relations, family, and citizenship transformed. These scholars include Rouse (1992), Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001), Levitt (2001), George (2005), and Keezhangatte (2007). This thesis also contributes to the study of migration and transnationalism by offering the Pakistani women's experience of transnational migration to Hong Kong.

In this thesis, I seek to answer the following questions: 1) How do Pakistani women live in Hong Kong and Pakistan as an ethnic minority, as Muslims and as marriage partners and mothers? 2) How do Pakistani women think about their homes? 3) How do they shift their identities when they are in Hong Kong and Pakistan?



## **Research on Related Areas**

As this research involves the concept of home and shifting identities in a transnational context, I divide the literature review into the following parts: transnationalism, shifting identities, home, gender, and Pakistanis overseas. As Pakistani women keep transnational connections between Hong Kong and Pakistan and live in both societies, the concept of transnationalism is of the utmost importance in this research. Transnationalism must be explained in order to further discuss other issues related to this research because the concept of home, identity and gender are all examined in a transnational context.

### **Transnationalism**

Scholars have long been studying transnationalism in relation to migrants: transnationalism can be studied in relation to the concept of home and place, migrants' cultural and socio-economic identities, communities and networks, and gender and ethnicity. In recent decades, many scholars have given various definitions to the term, "transnationalism" (Basch et al 1993, Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Vertovec and Cohen 1999, Portes et al. 2001). Basch et al. (1993:37) argue that transnationalism is "a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries". Portes et al (2001:8) hold similar views. They argue that transnationalism has three features: 1) the revolutionary advancement of communication technologies, which are cheap, easily accessed and fast for contacts across long distances; 2) the contact made possible because of these technological advancement in communications; 3) the involvement of the governments of the sending countries in promoting migration (cf. Leung 2004:17). Such transnational

connections are clearly visible in almost all migrant communities in the world today.

Let me briefly clarify why I choose to examine transnationalism rather than globalization in this thesis. Globalization and transnationalism are closely related concepts. Both theories refer to the impacts facilitated by advanced technologies in communications which make travel, trading and flows of capital possible. However, globalization is usually used in an economic context, and refers to the reduction of the barriers and restrictions in the flows of capital, people, and information across borders (George 2010). Transnationalism is usually discussed in the context of migrants, who keep close connections with their relatives in their sending community (George 2005, Levitt 2000, Glick Schiller and Fouron 1998, 2001). These connections are facilitated by cheap and fast communication and transportation technology. As I will discuss in the following literature review, many scholars discuss immigrant communities through the ideas of transnationalism. Thus, transnationalism is examined “as a specific form of globalization” in this thesis (George 2010).

A number of scholars have written ethnographies about the transnational lives of migrants. Levitt (2001) studies the transnational lives of migrants from Miraflores, Dominican Republic who live in Boston, in the United States. Using multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, she demonstrates how social remittances, such as ideas and practices of migrants, affect the migrants in the United States and the non-migrants left behind in terms of family, work and school life. She examines the underlying changes of values in the thinking behind gender, race and law of both groups and how religious, community and political organizations form and are formed by the transnational lives of migrants. It seems that the case of Miraflores is not unique and can reveal similar influences of migration and transnationalism on migrants in other



societies. She shows that migrants who keep their feet in both societies are very common today and will continue to be into the future.

Glick Schiller and Fouron (1998), who study Haitian migrants living in the United States, show that the politics of the nation-state is influenced by the movement and opinions as well as participation of Haitians in the United States. Opinions on privatization of electricity, presidential elections, and intervention of the United States in Haiti differ between Haitians who did not migrate and Haitians in the diaspora. The politics of the nation-state are expanded and deterritorialized when rich overseas Haitians are involved in the internal policies of Haiti. In *Georges Woke up Laughing*, Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001:4) discuss the long-distance nationalism of Haitians settled in the United States like Fouron (or Georges) and how and why they have become long-distance nationalists. This shows that these Haitians in the United States and other immigrants, such as Dominicans in the United States, live across two borders and have dual memberships in two countries. When Haitians go back to Haiti from the United States, they become the focus of admiration, social prestige and jealousy. Supporting the transnational family also means building the Haitian nation and being a patriotic Haitian (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001:8). Some Haitians from the United States may proudly explain how they help their nationals back home. However, when the relatives they helped in Haiti realize that their supporters are in fact poor in the United States, the relatives are very disappointed. Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001:89) mention that sending remittances and building social status in Haiti "limits the possibilities for prosperity for the majority of transmigrants." I find this relevant to the experience of my informants, who spend much of their savings helping relatives in Pakistan but do not prosper in Hong Kong.

Some scholars, for example Rouse (1992), study transnationalism in light of social class. He shows how migrants may occupy different class positions when they are in sending or receiving countries. He finds that the male Mexican migrants in the United States have multi-faceted roles: they are immobile and exploited workers in the United States but are exploiters who employ workers in Mexico. Rouse (1992:46) suggests that scholars be aware of both difficulties and changes that migrants experience as they move between countries. Rouse's findings are strikingly similar to the changes of roles of transnational Pakistani women which I found in my research.

These studies reflect the lives of migrants between the sending and receiving countries. In this thesis, such transnational lives between two places are taken into consideration as a component in influencing the and identity of Pakistani women between Hong Kong and Pakistan.

### **Shifting Identities**

A number of scholars study cultural identity and shifts in identities. In this research, I make use of the definition of cultural identity and the concept of the cultural supermarket held by Mathews (2000) to explain the flexibilities of Pakistani women in performing their identities as Muslims in Hong Kong. Also, I use Goffman's ideas of performance to discuss the shifting identities of Pakistani women.

Mathews (2000:17) defines cultural identity as "one's sense of culturally belonging to a given society, or beyond that, to the global cultural supermarket". To understand the concept of cultural supermarket, Mathews explains how a person is shaped by the surrounding world. There are three levels of such cultural shaping of a person. Only the third level is related to the concept of cultural supermarket. The first one is the taken-for-granted level of shaping. We are sometimes not conscious that we are shaped to act or think in certain ways. We are shaped by the society we are in,



the languages we speak and the social practices that we are used to. We are not aware that we take for granted certain ideas and values in our life. The second level of self's cultural shaping is that there is something in life which is beyond our control but we comprehend and accept it. For example, one may say, "I don't want to kiss up to the boss all the time even though he's an idiot", but one continues to obey his/her boss because he/she needs the job (Mathews 2000: 14). The third level is the most culturally conscious level of self's cultural shaping. We have full control and comprehension at this level. People have a variety of ideas and values which they choose to live by, as if they are in a cultural supermarket. Such a supermarket is like a material supermarket, where consumers can pick the products they want. However, in this cultural supermarket, people choose ideas and values, through certain material products, such as food, television programs or pop music. For instance, they can consume "Western classical music", "Indian ragas", or "grunge rock" (Mathews 2000:15). The information in the cultural supermarket may affect our identities. Our national identity, as one key factor of our cultural identity, may be "eroded by the cultural supermarket" because there are a variety of identities we can choose from in the cultural supermarket (Mathews 2000:17). People who are educated and affluent may have optimal choices in the "cultural supermarket". As a result, they have a variety of identities to choose from. Although there seems to be much freedom for some people to choose their identities in the cultural supermarket, Mathews emphasizes that the chooser always keeps an eye on the social world, which constrains the choices and performances of one's identity. While the world is culturally wide open, socially it is not, and therefore, "one's cultural choices must fit within one's social world" (Mathews 2000:22). While Pakistani women consume non-*halal* food from McDonald's, they cannot claim to be non-Muslims in front of

their Pakistani relatives in Hong Kong. They also have to fit in the social world they are in. Their choices are therefore not free. In this research, I adopt Mathews' ideas of cultural identity in relation to performances and negotiation with others. In Chapter 4, I will discuss how Pakistani women may choose their ideas and values in the cultural supermarket with certain conditions or constraints in their social world.

I use the ideas of Goffman (1959) in this thesis to analyze the shifting identities of Pakistani women. Goffman (1959:22) uses the concept of performance for people who may act in front of different audiences for a prolonged period of time and influence these audiences. The audiences are affected and encouraged to accept the image or impression which the performers give. The audiences may protect the face of the performers and not discredit them even though the audience members may know that the performers exaggerate their wealth and overseas experiences. This thesis adopts the concept of performances and audience segregation by Goffman in order to show how Pakistani women change their identities. This is partly inspired by Mani's (2003) study on the "performative acts" of South Asian youth in diaspora and state policies. In this research, I examine the performances of Pakistani women when they shift their identities and gender roles between Hong Kong and Pakistan. The difference between this research and the research by Mani is that she focuses on the state policies (Mani 2003:118) whereas this thesis studies the lived experience of Pakistani women.

There have been a number of scholars writing ethnographies on shifting identities. Let me discuss one of these ethnographies in detail. Louie (2004) studies how Chineseness is perceived and negotiated by young adults of Chinese descent from the United States and their distant relatives who live in Southern China. The transnational flows of ideas, people and goods, between the United States and China,



includes the following: popular culture (Kungfu movies), travel and business investment made possible by the improvement of the Guangdong economy and globalization (Louie 2004:101). These have facilitated the negotiation of identities, particularly, Chineseness. In addition, the renegotiation of identities by the young overseas Chinese Americans and Guangdong Chinese in mainland China has influenced by Chinese state mediation among the returned overseas Chinese and their investments, the deep-rooted concept of Chineseness in mainland China, and the concept of Asian Americans as foreigners in the United States. Louie takes various factors into consideration and has influenced my understanding of how Pakistanis may understand their own identities in the context of Hong Kong. The rising economic status of Hong Kong has influenced the performance of identities of Pakistani women when they go back to Pakistan, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Home**

In this thesis, I examine both physical and cognitive homes of Pakistani women in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. Physical home refers to the actual house or flat and the design within and surrounding the house. This can reflect the sense of home through the decoration and products consumed. Cognitive home is of greater importance in this research: Where do Pakistani women think they belong? Do they think they are leaving home or going home when they go to Pakistan? To study homes, a number of scholars in recent years refuse to define cognitive home as a fixed concept (Ahmed et al 2003:8). This is because “(h)omes are always made and remade as grounds and conditions (of work, of family, of political climate, etc) change” (Ahmed et al 2003:9).

Brah (1996:192) writes that home is “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination”. It is a place of “no return”, “even if it is possible to visit” (Brah

1996:192). Home is also “the lived experience of a locality”, in which a person can feel the hot and cold weather and so on (Brah 1996:192). Hence, home does not always refer to the homeland of a person although home and homeland can be the same place. “The notion of ‘home’ can be assembled from a plurality of places” if it refers to the place where they once lived or where their families are left (Leung 2004:53). In this case, Leung (2004:54) explains that “home is not simply an inheritance or determined solely by where one was born and to whom”. This research also uses the ideas of Brah and Leung in the studies of home as I will discuss in Chapter 6.

In short, home is a place where migrants feel secure and plan their futures (Davidson 2008:29, Leung 2004:9). It is related to the sense of belonging and the experience of migrants, based on intimate family relations (Ngan 2008:75). It is constructed by memories of diasporic communities (Davidson 2008:245, Lalich 2008:62). In this research, the ideas of “home” can be determined by migrants’ memories, senses of identity, and ways of living (Leung 2004, Davidson 2008, Ngan 2008, Agnew 2005).

### **Migration, Transnationalism and Gender**

Mahler (1998) suggests that future studies of transnational migration should focus on how gender is influenced or influences the experience of migrants. There have been many scholars who look at transnationalism and gender, some already mentioned (Glick Schiller et al 1992, Glick Schiller and Georges 2001). In the following section, I examine the study of female migrants.

Salih (2003) adopts a multi-sited ethnographic approach when studying the senses of belonging of Moroccan migrant women, and how their identities are shaped by their transnational lives in Morocco and Italy. The discussion of home in her



research is particularly useful for this thesis, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. She examines how the decoration and products of the physical home, such as food and utensils, are useful for the construction and continuity of senses of belonging for migrant women. The return trips to Italy are about the raising of social status and presentation of a “modern” image; for example, they present so-called Italian products to their relatives in Morocco. During the return trips with Moroccan women, Salih finds how these women reintegrate with or differentiate themselves from their relatives in Morocco (Salih 2003:160). Moroccan migrant women feel that their homes are in both Morocco and Italy, not because of their frequent travels to Morocco but because of their intense interactions with their relatives in Morocco.

Many scholars study females as the primary migrants, such as domestic workers in Hong Kong or Indian nurses in the United States (Keezhangatte 2007, George 2005). Keezhangatte (2007) has written a multi-sited ethnography about Indian female household workers in Hong Kong. He studies the transnational lives, emotional stress and hierarchies of gender relationships among these household workers in Hong Kong and their husbands in India. When they are in Hong Kong, they sometimes face exploitation by their employers. When they go back to India and demonstrate their wealth, their relatives do not understand their hardship in Hong Kong. Although these household workers enjoy a higher social status when they go back to India, they experience complicated and difficult issues in life, especially in marriage and family. This is because they are often away from their children and husbands. They experience a reversal of gender roles in marriage and family as the breadwinners. They are in a state of flux and they may change their views of home as they live overseas for many years. Keezhangatte’s research (2007) directly relates to my research because he shows how migrant women experience disharmony in

marriage and family when they go back to India (See Chapter 5). Indian household workers are middle-class in India but lower class in Hong Kong, which is also similar to the situation of Pakistani women in Hong Kong.

Transnational connections affect gender relations in the immigrant community as shown in the research of George (2005) on nurses from Kerala, India in the United States. She studies the flows of meanings, people and commodities between India and the United States with fieldwork in both countries (George 2005:9). The image of nurses in Kerala continues to be affected by the stereotype of nurses in Kerala as dirty and rebellious women. Even though these nurses are respectable professionals and make great financial contribution to their families in both the United States and Kerala, they are still seen as rebellious women. They are thought of as women who do not respect their mothers-in-law or take care of their children. Such a stigma not only affects their lives but also those of their husbands and children, and the gender relations in the Kerala community in the United States (George 2005:185). The gender relations of the home community affect the women in the immigrant community. I will come back to the work of George in Chapter 5 when I discuss the lives of Pakistani women as marriage partners and mothers.

These studies are significant for the understanding of female migrants and how they deal with differences in gender relations between the sending and receiving countries. Salih's work is relevant for the discussion of homes in both the physical and cognitive senses (See Chapter 6). Keezhangatte shows what Indian migrant women may experience when they go back to India in terms of transnational family care and marriage. This is useful in this research. George also shows how gossip may be spread to the immigrant community from India, which results in negotiation of gender roles within the immigrant community in the United States.



## **Pakistanis Overseas**

The studies of Pakistanis in the West have started earlier than in Hong Kong and have flourished in recent decades. Khan (1977) has written a multi-sited ethnography in villages in Mirpur, Pakistan and in Bradford, Great Britain. He records the migration history of the Mirpur Pakistanis to Britain and how they act when they go back to Pakistan. When these Pakistanis return to Pakistan, they demonstrate to their relatives that they care and fulfill the expectations of their family in the village. They buy plots of land, build houses or start small businesses when they go back to Pakistan (Khan 1977:70). Such increases in wealth have little impact on the social status of a Pakistani in Britain "but he can use his new wealth to gain an instant if limited, recognition in his home country" (1977:82). The experience of life between two places affects a migrant's attitude and behavior (1977:82). He faces a dilemma of neither living totally in Pakistan nor Britain. As Khan writes (1997:82-83),

Constrained by his traditional values and the societal pressures to conform he knows that certain steps toward the dominant British society (for financial reward, the educational advance of his children, etc.) are steps away from his own society. But, having left village life and his home, the migrant becomes dependent on both worlds. In one he achieves economic advancement and in the other he is accorded recognition of his success. Restricted to one world at any one time he lives totally in neither.

Khan also advocates multi-site ethnographic fieldwork so that the researcher can fully understand the lives of migrants between the two cultures, a view I adopt in this thesis.

Shaw (2000:108) studies the kinship ties of Pakistanis in Oxford, Great Britain and their influences on the Pakistani migrant community. She demonstrates that there are "striking continuities between life in Pakistan and the ways in which Pakistanis have adapted and used domestic space in Britain". Pakistanis adapt to the changes in their socio-economic status in Britain and they kept their ways of acting

and thinking, even within the younger generation (Shaw 2000:4). She explains such phenomena through kinship, which affects the migration decisions and development of Pakistani settlement in the United Kingdom. She also challenges the conventional view of the “English people” who think that Pakistani women are passive and controlled in the patriarchal system. The English, like some Hong Kong Chinese, have little understanding of the customs of Pakistanis. The channel through which they knew Pakistani women was through health centres or other public institutions where Pakistani women have difficulties expressing themselves in English. But the lives of Pakistani women in her studies are much more complicated than what non-Pakistanis may think after their superficial interactions with Pakistanis. Likewise, Pakistani women in Hong Kong also keep very close family ties with their relatives. They are also misunderstood by the mainstream Hong Kong Chinese in Hong Kong.

Werbner (2002) shows that British Pakistanis hope for a return to Pakistan one day and are keen on helping Pakistani nationals in Pakistan through donations at times of war and disasters. British Pakistanis criticize the defects of Pakistan and they support the cricket team of Pakistan. Werbner (2002b) also finds that Pakistani Muslims see themselves as part of the Muslim diaspora. They donate money to Muslim organizations to help other Muslims in need overseas. Pakistani women in Hong Kong may also play similar role by assisting their relatives in Pakistan.

### *Pakistani Overseas and Identities*

There are a number of scholars who study shifting identities of ethnic minorities and Muslims (Rytter 2009, Read and Bartkowski 2000, Werbner 2002, Plüss 2006). Rytter (2009:3) argues that some Pakistanis must or can decide their identities depending on the recognition of significant others and situations. The second generation Pakistanis in Denmark try to negotiate their identities in the context of family, return trips to Pakistan, and the different views of Pakistan and



Islam between two or three generations. In order to show the negotiations between the older Pakistanis from Pakistan and their offspring born in Copenhagen, Rytter analyzes a drama written and performed by Pakistani students in Copenhagen. The young Pakistanis in this drama find it difficult to communicate with their parents or grandparents in terms of arranged marriage or senses of belonging because of their different life experiences. Rytter (2009) argues that the negotiation of identities does not only happen in a socio-political context but also in the context of the transnational family.

Read and Bartkowski (2000) contrast the views of veiling held by women in Texas who do and do not veil themselves. They argue that there is a stereotype toward women who veil in the West. They interviewed both elite Islamic women and rank-and-file Muslim women. They find that Muslim women of different factions have distinctly different views of veils and Koran, but that there is congruence in the views of both veiled and unveiled women. They both support public rights of women and exercise their agency in crafting their gender identities. In this thesis, I study how Pakistani women in Hong Kong negotiate their identities not only by veiling, but also through their other social activities, such as housewarming parties when they go back to Pakistan.

In 2009, a number of scholars collaborated in an edited volume, *Pakistani Diasporas*, which includes studies conducted in the Middle East, Italy, Australia, Norway, Netherlands, and the United States (Khan and Kalra 2009). This shows that the studies of Pakistani diaspora have become more and more popular in the West in recent years. However, such studies have not yet expanded to Hong Kong or other neighboring countries in East Asia that have Pakistani communities.

#### *Pakistanis Overseas and Female Agency*

Some feminist scholars speak up for female migrants who face patriarchal control

within their community and racism in their host community (Sakamoto and Zhou 2005). Other scholars find that migrants are not always the victims in diaspora (Agnew 2005:5). There are thus two major views of female migrants. One side deems them as passive, invisible and subordinate to men, particularly for Pakistani women because of Islamic law (Wilson 2006). Some Pakistani women are seen as victims under both Islamic law and the patriarchal system (Mohammad 2007) or of racial discrimination (Crenshaw 2003). Another side has highlighted the agency of South Asian women in aspects such as their employment, marriage, fashion, lesbian relations and education (Mani 2003, Shah 2002, Purewal 2003, Ramji 2003, Raghuram 2003). These scholars challenge the presumption of Pakistani women as a weak and passive group (Werbner 1990, 2002, Shaw 2001, Charsley 2007, Charsley and Shaw 2006, Bolognani 2009). For example, Werbner (1990:126-7) finds that Pakistani women in Manchester initiated a circle of trust between women and built and sustained a network among themselves. Even though they have low industrial wages, they are strong in building relationships, she argues. Pakistani women in this research also have very strong networks with other women in Hong Kong and Pakistan.

Some scholars claim that there has been an overemphasis on the agency and individualization of South Asian, Muslim or Pakistani women, particularly on the second and third generations (Wilson 2006:171). Hojabri (2006:232) suggests that scholars should treat their subjects neither as “powerless victims of a patriarchal tradition or religion” nor as “entirely empowered and assertive agents of their own lives”. Neither position allows for a full understanding of Pakistani or Muslim women who migrated overseas. One can only say that “migration...decentred and opened up new sites of contestation and resistance in gender relations” (Davidson



2008:248). These Muslim women actively improve their lives when they face harsh conditions and “transform unequal power relations at personal and public levels...” (Hojabri 2006:232). Migration has given female migrants the chance to negotiate their gender roles in the host places.

### *Pakistanis in Hong Kong*

White (1994) studies the history of the settlement of Indians, including Pakistanis, in Hong Kong. She is one of the pioneers in studying Indian communities in Hong Kong. She shows that Pakistanis in Hong Kong can be traced back to the 1840s when British employed Indians to come to Hong Kong to work as soldiers, who developed the Muslim community in Hong Kong. Other scholars, such as Weiss (1991), discuss the early lives and identities of Hong Kong-born and raised South Asian Muslims. She provides vivid accounts of the history of Punjabi Muslims in Hong Kong in the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the partition of India, some Indians began to claim that they were Pakistanis (Weiss 1991:444). She concludes that religion and ethnicity intertwine to form the identity of South Asian Muslims in Hong Kong.

Plüss (2006) shows how Muslims of different ethnicities in Hong Kong may establish transnational connections outside Hong Kong (de-territorialization), but at the same time, connect themselves with the ethnic majorities and build their own local ethnic community within Hong Kong (re-territorialization). She points out that newer immigrants from Pakistan and India tend to keep transregional connections outside Hong Kong yet cannot completely avoid connecting themselves with the ethnic majority, such as Chinese and other ethnic groups, in Hong Kong (Plüss 2006:668). She also argues that Bohra Muslims dress in ways that help them assimilated in majority Muslim groups. This concept of both detaching from Hong Kong and rooting in Hong Kong with other ethnic groups can be used to understand Pakistani women. These women create distance between themselves and the majority

Hong Kong Chinese but also try to adapt to Hong Kong Chinese society in the way they dress and act.

Plüss (2000:2) also studies how Indians of different ethnic origins make use of their transnational connections and their cultural capital “in ways that they believed would give them a competitive edge over the other members of Hong Kong society”. She argues (2000:1,2) that transnationalism is about how migrants bring skills and values( i.e., their cultural capital,) from their home country to use strategically in order to adapt to the host society. For example, the Borah Muslims and Parsees in the 19<sup>th</sup> century made use of their connections with India to work with the British, which was important for the India-China opium trade (Plüss 2000:4). Indians, Sikhs, and in general the Punjabis, were seen as soldiers in the early 20th century and therefore, they were recruited to Hong Kong to work as policemen. This group of Sikhs in the early days did not emphasize their connections with India. Instead, they stressed their loyalty to Great Britain and to Hong Kong (Plüss 2000:7). The perception of the identities of Indians thus depends on how the British or Chinese saw them and their niche in the labor market. This stereotype of Indians and their niche in the labor market still affects the Pakistanis and Sikhs today, who tend to be seen as policemen, security guards or watchmen.

Pakistanis have also been studied as an ethnically discriminated group in Hong Kong. Scholars studying Pakistanis in Hong Kong hope for the elimination of racial discrimination and advocate ethnic equality and rights when they study Pakistanis. There are three reports by applied social scientists, which are specifically related to Pakistani women: Ku et al (2003), Ku (2006), and Ho et al (2007). These studies see these women as “invisible” and “passive” (Ku 2006). Nevertheless, this emphasis is perhaps in a sense inevitable because these scholars cooperated with



social service organizations aiming to raise awareness of racial discrimination.

Ku et al's study (2003:i) of Pakistanis in Hong Kong covers their social activities, housing, work and employment, and children's education. They argue that Pakistanis usually find it difficult to make Hong Kong or mainland Chinese friends. Pakistanis experience problems with housing – they are rejected by real estate agencies, and some do not know how to apply for public housing. Only a few of them receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (social welfare benefits) and most do not feel that they need to apply for it (Ku et al 2003:i), even if they are financially in need. Half of the respondents think that Hong Kong is their home but they do not enjoy being with Hong Kong Chinese people and have ambivalent attitudes toward Hong Kong Chinese (2003:ii).

Ku et al (2003:40) also discuss whether Pakistanis consider Hong Kong as their home and how they think about their ethnic identities: around half of the respondents of the survey think that "Hong Kong is a better place to live in and stay than Pakistan." (Ku et al 2003:40) However, "whenever there are better alternatives, some may migrate and build their homes in other countries." (Ku et al 2003:40) Ku et al (2003:40) also point out that around 90% of the respondents identify themselves as Pakistanis. "Only 2% say that they are both a Pakistani and a Hong Kong person" (Ku et al 2003:40). Thus, we can judge from the data that half of the respondents value Hong Kong as home and almost all of them retain their Pakistani identity.

These studies show that ethnic minorities have to face strong racial discrimination because of a multi-layered racial hierarchy in Hong Kong. Tam (2008) notes that the racial hierarchy of Hong Kong "is largely based on class and the Chinese population's experience of British Colonialism". She writes,

Obviously, among the minorities, a hierarchy exists both in terms of consciousness and practice, and is largely based on class and the Chinese

population's experience of British colonialism. Sadly in everyday life this hierarchy manifests as a 19<sup>th</sup> century misunderstanding of race – one that is ranked according to the shade of skin color.

In this literature review, I have examined many of the scholars whom I will discuss further in the later chapters of this thesis. Weiss (1991), White (1994) and Ku et al. (2003) have provided important background information of Pakistanis in Hong Kong. I will also rely greatly on the ideas of Salih (2003) regarding physical and cognitive homes and Muslim practices among Pakistani women in a transnational context, Mathews' (1996) ideas of the cultural supermarket and Goffman's (1959) ideas of performance to discuss the shifting identities of Pakistani women.

## **Methodology**

This research is a multi-sited ethnography of the lives of Pakistani women in Hong Kong and their experiences when returning to Pakistan. Both Hong Kong and Pakistan were used as field sites. Participant observation and semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted between September 2008 and September 2009 in Hong Kong. Two fieldtrips, in which I accompanied three informants, were carried out in Pakistan, mainly in the Punjab and Rawalpindi districts in January 2008 and July 2009.

### **Interviews and Participant Observation**

The fieldwork began in a community centre, where there were a female Pakistani program worker and some Pakistani female volunteers. These Pakistani women in the centre later became my key informants in this research. Around 60% of the people I interviewed were referred to by them. Snowball sampling was also used, and contacts made during social activities. Ultimately, I met over 40 women whom I interviewed informally. Among these 40 women, 22 were interviewed more formally



for two to three hours. These interviews were carried out in the homes of these Pakistani women and occasionally in their workplaces, restaurants or on the telephone. Key informants were visited repeatedly and follow-up interviews were common, thanks to their willingness to help.

These women were usually new immigrants who had lived in Hong Kong for a number of years. Many of my informants are of similar background. They usually speak Punjabi, Urdu and some Cantonese and English. Most come from villages in Attock and Chalwar in Pakistan. In Hong Kong, they live in old private housing or public housing estates and their husbands work in construction or transportation. Some Pakistani men are relatively more willing to let their wives go to community centres than other Pakistani men. I also talked to Pakistani women's teenage daughters or adult daughters.

I sometimes approached Pakistani women whom I met on public transportation and restaurants. Two of them, Jamila and Asba (pseudonymns) were interviewed for a number of hours. Jamila was very different from the women I met at the community centre. She is from a very rich family in Islamabad where her father runs a security services company. Her husband, an Australian Pakistani works in Hong Kong in a multinational corporation as a professional in information technology. Asba grew up in Pakistan and was a qualified teacher in Hong Kong.

There is a degree of variation among the Pakistani women I interviewed. Some received secondary school education in cities in Pakistan while some only received two or three years of education in their home village in Pakistan when they were six to eight years old. One of them was fluent in Cantonese, Punjabi, Pashto and Urdu and had received five to six years of education in Hong Kong. These women were also of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. One of them was a

Pashto raised in Punjab in Pakistan and Fanling in Hong Kong. One of them is a Shia and the rest are Sunni Muslims. As mentioned, most informants are from Punjab; one used to live in a village near Karachi in Sindh province and another came from Sialkot, the fourth largest city in Pakistan. The impact of their castes maybe downplayed in this thesis as the scope of the thesis would become too broad if caste was also investigated deeply. Their cultural background varied greatly and unfortunately, during my research period I was not able to grasp enough to make a clear and significant comparison of their varied cultural backgrounds.

Below is a summary of the 24 Pakistanis, both men and women, whom I formally interviewed. For those I interviewed informally, I do not include it in this table for fear of confusion. I also do not quote their names in this thesis.



### Summary of Informants

	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Place of birth	Total number of years in Hong Kong	Marital status	Class in Hong Kong	Education	Bride Migrant	Remarks
1	Jannat	28	Dish washer	Pakistan	9	Married	Lower	Metric	Yes	
2	Abida	36	Clerk	Pakistan	3	Married	Middle	Master	Yes	
3	Adaza	39	Housewife	Hong Kong	17	Married	Lower	Form 1	No	
4	Jamila	21	Waitress	Pakistan	0.5	Married	Middle	Form 7	Yes	
5	Asba	26	Student	Pakistan	2	Single	Lower	Master	No	
6	Bapsi	27	Housewife	Pakistan	17	Married	Lower	Primary	No	
7	Fatima	17	Unemployed	Pakistan	1	Engaged	Lower	Form 5	No	
9	Sabria	36	Program Worker	Hong Kong	14	Married	Lower	Form 7	No	
10	Noshaba	26	Housewife	Hong Kong	10	Married	Lower	Primary 1	No	
11	Zarina	36	Watchman	Pakistan	9	Married	Lower	Primary 2	Yes	
12	Bibi	30	Teacher	Hong Kong	30	Single	Middle	Master	No	
13	Mina	21	Student	Pakistan	13	Single	Lower	Undergraduate	No	
14	Leila	24	Program Worker	Hong Kong	13	Single	Lower	Form 7	No	
15	Husna	27	Unemployed	Pakistan	2	Divorced	Lower	Metric	Yes	
17	Parwin	54	Housewife	Pakistan	5	Married	Lower	Metric	Yes	
18	Bisharrat	27	Program Worker	Hong Kong	3	Single	Lower	Master	No	

19	Fozia	29	Teaching Assistant	Pakistan	3	Married	Lower	Form 7	Yes	
20	Namira	19	Student	Pakistan	6	Single	Lower	Form 4	No	
21	Marufa	19	Housewife	Pakistan	N/A	Married	Upper	Fsc (High school)	N/A	
22	Malika	42	Housewife	Pakistan	13	Married	Lower	Metric	Yes	
23	Zafar	43	Electrician	Hong Kong	43	Married	Lower	Form 5	N/A	Jannat's husband
24	N/A	45	Tailor	Pakistan	14	Married	Lower	Unknown	N/A	Sabira's husband



The interviews were conducted in English and Cantonese as I do not speak Urdu or Punjabi. During my fieldwork in Pakistan, the language commonly used by my informants was Punjabi because I stayed with informants who are of Punjabi origin. However, interviews and participant observation were facilitated by my informants who were fluent in English or Cantonese. I picked up some useful Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic phrases which were taught by my informants, as some of the terms they use in their daily life cannot be easily translated into English or Cantonese. My informants can talk in front of me freely because it is assumed that I do not understand the conversation and I am not part of the community. When they gossiped in front of me, I pretended that I did not understand anything, even though I could tell quite a bit from their facial expression. However, the fact that I do not speak Urdu and Punjabi may have affected my research.

In the interviews, I asked questions in the following areas: 1) the subjective identification of Pakistani women from Hong Kong, 2) their life experiences in both Hong Kong and Pakistan, and 3) their thoughts about their homes in Pakistan and Hong Kong. I have tried to understand their experiences of migration, marriage, divorce, family conflict or work.

In terms of participant observation, I stayed overnight at the homes of a few Pakistani women in Hong Kong. I also followed them when visiting friends, on community service, and in prayer gatherings. I joined the celebration for Pakistan Day and *eid* at the homes of Pakistani women or in the Pakistani Association. I grasped something of their daily routines, cultural and religious practices in Hong Kong through this participant observation.

### **Field Visits**

In this research, there were also two trips to Pakistan: one took place in January 2009

for a week in Hassanabdal and another one was carried out between July and August 2009 for a month in Rawalpindi, and villages near Wah Cantonment (often abbreviated as Wah Cantt) and Hassanabdal.

These trips involved mainly participant observation and interviews concerning the following: 1) how these Pakistani women live as middle class in Pakistan, overseas nationals in Hong Kong, Muslims and marriage partners in both places, and 2) how they present their identities in front of different audiences. During these trips, the Pakistani women I know shifted their identities through dress and investment in land and property. They handled the conflicts and negotiations within joint family and transnational marriages quite carefully.

On these fieldtrips, I acted as a visitor more than as a researcher, when compared to my role in Hong Kong. Two of my informants downplayed the purpose of my visit to Pakistan to their relatives and claimed that I was the English teacher of their daughters. Both might have worried that their family members would feel uncomfortable about my visit as a researcher. However, this approach was beneficial for this investigation and data could be collected easily because I was seen as a close friend of the family.

In these two trips, I followed three informants, whom I have named Jannat, Adaza and Asba, to their homes.<sup>1</sup> In the first trip, I followed Jannat to her home in Hassanabdal and traveled to Islamabad and Lahore to see other relatives.<sup>2</sup> In this trip I observed the customs and lives of Pakistanis in urban Pakistan, and how my informant presented her identity in front of different audiences. In the second trip, I stayed with two different Pakistani women from Hong Kong. Adaza lived with her

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<sup>1</sup> All the names of my informants in this thesis are pseudonyms to disguise their true identities. Other details are also disguised at certain crucial points.

<sup>2</sup> Jannat is married to a non-Pakistani Muslim. To protect her identity, her husband's nationality is not disclosed here.



in-laws in a village near Wah Cantt. Through this trip, I witnessed her rural life in her village in Pakistan and her proud return as a daughter-in-law who helped her husband to migrate to Hong Kong. After two weeks, I went to stay with Asba, who was a daughter of a Pakistani immigrant in Hong Kong. In this family, I observed closely how Pakistani immigrants from Hong Kong decorated their houses in Pakistan and moved from the village to the city.

Through these two trips, I discovered a few different scenarios of Pakistani women: Jannat stayed with her natal family in Pakistan because her family members are mostly in Pakistan and her in-laws are in Hong Kong. The image she presented shows her rising social status and unique experience in Hong Kong. Unlike Jannat, Adaza went back to stay with her in-laws in the trip. Adaza used to live with her in-laws and be exploited by them in Pakistan before she moved to Hong Kong. She ended this kind of life after 2005 and has since shown her disapproval of her in-laws. Consequently, her life in Pakistan has been considerably different from Jannat, who has no need to deal with in-laws of Pakistani origin in Hong Kong or Pakistan. Asba is a young, single and well-educated woman. She lived in Pakistan with her mother and moved to Hong Kong three years ago. When she went back to Pakistan, she faced pressure to be married off, so her experience differs from Jannat and Adaza, who are both married mothers.

To sum up, this research has adopted multi-sited fieldwork in order to investigate the lives of Pakistani women in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. This investigation was conducted using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation in social gatherings of Pakistani women in Hong Kong and Pakistan. The field visits have provided valuable data about the lives of Pakistani women in Pakistan and their sentiments toward their identities as

Pakistanis overseas.

## **Summary of Chapters**

This introductory chapter, and the whole layout of the thesis, has been structured around the lives, sense of home and sense of identity of Pakistani women in Hong Kong.

Chapter 2, entitled “Background of Hong Kong Pakistanis”, first discusses the characteristics of the South Asian diaspora and the historical background of Pakistanis in Hong Kong. Then I explore the current situation of Pakistanis living in Hong Kong, and specific background of transnational Pakistani women interviewed in this research: Pakistani women live in Hong Kong because they are the descendants of colonial officials in Hong Kong, bride migrants who married Hong Kong Pakistanis, and/or descendants of Chinese-Pakistani couples.

Chapter 3 shows how Pakistani women live in both Hong Kong and Pakistan in terms of their living environment, family system and social status. I give a brief description of the lives and household settings of Pakistani women from rural areas in Pakistan. I contrast their lives with the lives of Pakistani women in Hong Kong. I then compare the lives of Pakistani women in the joint family systems and nuclear family residence in Pakistan and Hong Kong. Finally, I discuss the lives of Pakistani women as an ethnic minority (lower-class) in Hong Kong and as overseas returned Pakistanis (middle-class) in Pakistan.

Chapter 4 discusses the lives of Pakistani women as Muslims who selectively practice Islam in Hong Kong. I divide this chapter into two parts. In the first part, I examine their lives in the context of the cultural supermarket where they can choose ideas and values through their access to the Internet and cable television (cf.



Mathews 2000). I explain this through the consumption of *halal* food and the views of sexuality. These women, however, face pressures from the social world they are in, which are exerted by their audiences, such as relatives and parents or Hong Kong Chinese (cf. Goffman 1959). As a result, in the second part, I discuss how these women who have migrated to Hong Kong make adjustments as they try to live as Muslims.

Chapter 5 concerns the lives of Pakistani women as marriage partners and mothers, and their problems in their marriage and family. Through the various stories of my informants, I explain the problems arising from transnational marriage, early marriage and lack of education, split households, extra-marital affairs and conflicts with in-laws. All these are common problems which the Pakistani women I interviewed have experienced. I argue that there is a continual renegotiation of these women's gender roles.

Chapter 6, "Sense of Home", inspired by Salih (2003), analyzes both physical and cognitive homes of Pakistani women in Hong Kong and Pakistan. The design and decoration of the physical home may show how these women see home cognitively. In the second part of the chapter, I examine their views of home. Some may see Hong Kong as home. Others may see both Hong Kong and Pakistan as home. Their ideas of home depend on their family, and economic opportunities in their receiving and sending places. The views of home are also related to their memories and experiences in both Hong Kong and Pakistan.

Chapter 7, "Senses of Identity", illustrates why and how Pakistani women shift their identities in Hong Kong and Pakistan through dress and investment. I use Goffman's ideas of performances to explain the different social contexts in which Pakistani women present their identities. Their performances in front of their

relatives in Pakistan show their upward mobility and Hongkongese identity.

Overall, this research argues that Pakistani women who travel between two places build their homes and shift their identities based on their transnational experiences. I hope that this thesis can contribute to the understanding of transnational Pakistani women in Hong Kong and to the larger area of migration studies.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Background of Hong Kong Pakistanis**

#### **Introduction**

The Pakistani diaspora has become a popular area of study in recent decades (Ballard 1987, Werbner 1990, 2002, Shaw 2000). However, while understanding of Pakistanis in Hong Kong has risen in recent years, little is known about transnational Pakistani women in Hong Kong, who travel frequently between Hong Kong and Pakistan. An understanding of the historical background of Pakistanis is crucial to make sense of the lives and senses of identity of Pakistani women in Hong Kong. In this chapter, I begin with the features of the Pakistani diaspora, which may be helpful in understanding Pakistani women in Hong Kong. I then discuss how and when Pakistanis migrated to Hong Kong, and the current situation of Pakistanis in Hong Kong. Lastly, I focus on the definition of transnational Pakistani women in my thesis.

#### **The Pakistani Diaspora**

A few characteristics of Pakistanis in Britain should be noted, as this may be relevant to the Pakistanis in Hong Kong. These characteristics are: 1) a sense of responsibility for their relatives in Pakistan; 2) migration and kinship networks; 3) the large sum of their remittances to Pakistan and 4) dual migration.

Many Pakistanis have a sense of responsibility to their homeland (Werbner 2002). Pakistanis overseas show hospitality to visitors from Pakistan and provide material support to relatives or communities in Pakistan. This reflects their sense of belonging to their homeland and contributes to the continued transnational connections between Pakistan and Britain (Werbner 2002:128). This sense of

responsibility results in strong connections among Pakistani relatives, and forms and strengthens the Pakistani diaspora (Werbner 2002b).

The migration of Pakistanis is closely related to their kinship network. As Shaw (2000:4) notes, “migration was viewed as a means of furthering the interests of the *biradari* or extended family....The kinship-based structure of migration subsequently influenced the development of the Pakistani settlement in Britain”. One popular way of migration is to migrate through marriage between overseas Pakistanis and relatives in Pakistan (Shaw 2000:4). Transnational family care and marriage is important for Pakistanis overseas and their relatives left in Pakistan (Harris and Shaw 2009). Transnational marriage and family care are also commonly found among Pakistanis in Hong Kong, as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

There is a large sum of remittances flowing to Pakistan from overseas Pakistanis, which is related to the first two features outlined above: Pakistanis overseas tend to send enormous amounts to Pakistan because they have relatives back home and feel a sense of responsibility towards them. While adapting to new lifestyles and struggling in new countries, Pakistani migrants continue to send remittances to Pakistan. The remittances of the overseas Pakistanis are important for the economy in Pakistan. For instance, the remittances of migrant workers to Pakistan in 1983 “paid for 55% of all merchandise imports of Pakistan” (Knerr 1990:173). In 2006, the remittances from overseas officially constituted 4% of the GDP of Pakistan, although this figure may be much lower than the actual one (Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008).<sup>3</sup> There were 7 million Pakistanis overseas who contribute USD8 billion of remittances in 2008 (Eteraz 2009), and the

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Migration and Remittances Factbook (2008), “The true size of remittances, including unrecorded flows through formal and informal channels, is believed to be larger.”



figure was even higher in 2009 (The Nation 2009)<sup>4</sup>. All my informants and their husbands send remittances to their relatives in Pakistan. This is why my informants can challenge the joint family system when they go back to Pakistan, as I will discuss in Chapters 3 and 7.

Pakistani migrants experience dual migration: this means that they have to move from villages to cities and from one country to another country because most of them are of rural origin (Clarke et al 1990, Werbner 1990). Pakistani migrants have to adapt to both different cultures overseas and to urban lifestyles after their migration. Some Pakistanis moved from village to cities within Pakistan before they migrated to Britain but this is not common among overseas Pakistanis. The majority of Pakistanis in Britain are of “small-scale, middle or low-ranking landowning backgrounds” (Shaw 2000:291). Similarly, most of my Hong Kong Pakistani informants used to live in villages before they migrated to Hong Kong, except those who benefited from remittances from their fathers and grew up in urban area in Pakistan, or grew up in Hong Kong. The migration from rural to urban areas within Pakistan has been a recent development (Shaw 2000:291), and most of my informants visit their relatives in the country, rather than cities in Pakistan. Many Pakistanis in Hong Kong have experienced dual migration (see Chapter 3).

Pakistanis in Great Britain and those in Hong Kong are similar in terms of their social status in their receiving places; both of them are lower class. Pakistanis in Britain are usually “on the lowest rung of the ladder of structural assimilation, because of their relatively limited competence in English and their lack of professional qualifications” (Shaw 2000:293). Although Pakistanis are lower class in

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<sup>4</sup> As The Nation (2009) writes, “Overall, in the first nine months (July-March 2009) of current 2008-09 fiscal year, the country received an amount of \$5,658.06 million as workers’ remittances as against \$4,728.37 million during the same period of the last fiscal year showing an increase of \$929.69 million or 19.66 percent.”

Britain, they may feel proud to return to Pakistan initially because they receive much attention and gain status and influence there (Khan 1977:71). Similarly, Pakistanis are lower class in Hong Kong but they enjoy their “higher class” status when they go back to Pakistan, as I will discuss in Chapters 3 and 7.

In short, Pakistanis overseas tend to have a strong sense of responsibility toward their relatives in Pakistan, and close connections through kinship networks, and therefore send a large sum of remittances to Pakistan. Also, they experience dual migration, as they migrated from rural areas in Pakistan to urban areas overseas directly. They are, again, lower class in Hong Kong and middle class in Pakistan.

## **History and Origins of Pakistanis in Hong Kong**

There is little literature about the history of Pakistani women in Hong Kong. Scholars who study South Asian Muslims and Indians are the most significant contributors to the study of the history of Pakistanis in Hong Kong (Weiss 1991, White 1994). This section provides the historical background of Pakistanis, or Punjabi Muslims, as Pakistanis were a subgroup of Indians before the partition of India and West Pakistan on August 14, 1947 (Weiss 2006:143). First I briefly discuss the Punjabi Muslims who migrated to Hong Kong before World War II and then examine the migration of Pakistanis to Hong Kong after the partition of India and Pakistan.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Indians were recruited to Hong Kong and other colonies of the British Empire as seamen and traders. Weiss (1991:419) writes,

“(I)n the wake of the British Empire,...Muslim seamen and traders...came originally as sailors with the East India Company from Campbellpur (now Attock), Hazara (now Abbottabad), Lahore and Gujarat and as traders and contractors in the wake of the growing British Empire, though larger numbers shortly followed as security staff (in the military, police and prisons) in the Empires’ service.”



White (1994:59) confirms that Indians were recruited by the East India Company to China and Japan in the 1820s. Some of them were Muslims from Lahore and Campbellpur, which are now in Pakistan. The British Empire recruited South Asians to work as seamen, traders and even military personnel in India, and some Muslims were sent to the colonies of Great Britain to maintain law and order (Weiss 1991:419). The male descendents of these South Asian Muslims in Hong Kong grew up and married the South Asian female Muslims in Hong Kong or Chinese women who converted to Islam (Weiss 1991:422). However, these South Asian Muslims were “a minority in Hong Kong, with nowhere to go” (Weiss 1991:452). “Their sense of security is not the same as among the Pakistanis or the Chinese. The tendency is that the local community associates itself with the British administration more than do the expatriate Pakistanis or the indigenous Chinese” (Weiss 1991:452). The South Asian Muslims are therefore a different group from the Pakistanis who came after World War II. The South Asian Muslims who work as seamen and traders, however, contributed to the Muslim community by requesting the building of Shelly Street mosque and Happy Valley Cemetery (Weiss 1991:424-5).<sup>5</sup> They also distinguish themselves from Pakistanis who came in the recent decades.

These South Asian Muslims were outnumbered by the Muslims from Punjab province in India in the late nineteenth century in Hong Kong (Weiss 1991:426). “The British brought many to Hong Kong as soldiers, police officers, guards (marine, jail, dockyard, and post office...); in line with this tradition, many more came later as private watchmen and security guards” (Weiss 1991:426). These Punjabi Muslims

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<sup>5</sup> Shelly Street mosque, also called Jamaiah Masjid, is the oldest mosque in Hong Kong. It was built in 1890 and renovated in 1905 and is listed by the Hong Kong government as a historical building (Masjids and Islamic Centres in Hong Kong 2010). Happy Valley Cemetery is also known as Hong Kong Cemetery, which is a Muslim cemetery (Hong Kong Muslim Cemetery 2010).

were usually non-landowning, and not well educated for various historical and socio-cultural reasons. They became security forces along the coastal treaty ports of China (Weiss 1991:426). Weiss (1991:430) stresses that “the impact of Punjabi Muslims in police and prison services on the formation of the local Muslim community was significant”. Some Pakistanis were later recruited as policemen in Hong Kong because of the good performance of Punjabi Muslims.<sup>6</sup>

During the Japanese occupation in World War II, most Punjabi traders and seamen fled to Macau or China for refuge, with some returning to Hong Kong after the end of the war (Weiss 1991:432). The partition of India into Pakistan and India took place in 1947. From then on, a number of Punjabi Muslims referred themselves as Pakistanis (Weiss 1991:444).

Let me now examine Pakistanis who came to Hong Kong as policemen in the 1950s, as many of my informants are the descendants of policemen in Hong Kong. After World War II, some Indians on the police force were expelled because they may have had close relations with Japanese authorities in World War II (White 1994:114). Around 150 Pakistanis “were brought into the Hong Kong Police Force and were soon assigned to Emergency Units” (White 1994:114). Some of these policemen are the fathers of my informants. According to *Offbeat* (2002), the online magazine of the Hong Kong Police Force, Pakistanis were recruited to the Hong Kong Police in 1953, and formed the Emergency Unit in response to the Korean War

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<sup>6</sup> Punjabi Muslims played a significant role in prison services. The first Punjabis came to Hong Kong to work in Victoria Prison in 1880 (Weiss 1991:432). There were around 200 Muslims working in Stanley Prison in 1935 (Weiss 1991:432). The Punjabi Muslims lived near Shelley Street Mosque and were not allowed to marry local Chinese women, although such restriction was cancelled when Japanese took over Hong Kong (Weiss 1991:431). These Punjabi Muslims had to leave their wives in Punjab, part of Pakistan today. It was estimated that there were around 800 Punjabis (half of them were Sikhs, the other half were Muslims) in 1941 prior the Japanese occupation (Weiss 1991:431). There were not many female Punjabi Muslims who lived in Hong Kong from the 1880s to 1941, since the Punjabi Muslims who worked in security services were not allowed to bring over their wives and children before 1941.



and the problems caused by the 50,000 British and Commonwealth troops.<sup>7</sup> Weiss does not mention if Pakistanis were allowed to bring their wives and children to Hong Kong. However, according to my informant, Adaza, her father went back to Pakistan to get married after he served in Hong Kong for a few years. He brought his wife to Hong Kong, where Adaza was born. There was no restriction on whether these Pakistani policemen could marry Hong Kong Chinese women; Weiss (1991:431) writes that a few of them did so.

According to Fanlink (2010), a website designed by the descendants of Hong Kong Policemen of Pakistani origin, Pakistanis were recruited to work as policemen in Hong Kong because there was political and social instability after Second World War.<sup>8</sup> The organizer of the Fanlink writes:

Hong Kong...was faced with a multitude of problems including street crime, drugs, triads, political instability and illegal immigration from China due to unstable political situation right after 1949. A new unit called E.U.N.T. (Emergency Unit of New Territories) was created of the new Pakistani recruits upon completion of basic training, which had to...[be on] stand by for 24 hours a day, execute various other duties such as riot control, stop illegal immigration and crime as the Force was not divided into departments to deal with different jobs. The Pakistanis displayed professionalism, courage and initiative in their duties under very difficult situations. Some of them even sacrificed their lives in the line of duty on 7th July, 1967, like late Mr. Muhammad Nawaz (PC3033) and late Mr. Muhammad Khursheed (PC3015) in a border incident later to be known as the Sha Tau Kok Incident. A second British recruitment delegation was sent to Pakistan in July 1961 which brought 47 more personnel which further lessened the pressure on the existing members and a three shift rotation was introduced. Now the E.U.N.T. was assigned with border patrol, emergency rescue operations and standby for other tasks as required from time to time. Some of the Pakistanis were promoted to high ranks and many received Colonial Service awards.

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<sup>7</sup> The year, "1953" is subject to debate. Weiss (1991:434) said that "The Hong Kong government sent all Sikh policemen back to India in 1951, and over 150 Pakistani Muslims, mainly Punjabis and Pathans, arriving in the Colony in 1952. Pakistanis were recruited for a decade more, with the final contingent of 46 men arrive in Hong Kong in 1961." Thus, it seems that the Pakistanis came to Hong Kong in 1952, but not in 1953 according to *Offbeat*.

<sup>8</sup> The website is very useful in connecting Pakistanis who once lived in Fanling that have lost contact with their childhood friends. Some Pakistanis who migrated to United Kingdom or settled in Hong Kong can use this website to find their old friends from Fanling. Some exchange information and go on the Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Mecca) together. Afterwards, they post pictures on the website.



This description by Fanlink reveals how Pakistanis came to Hong Kong to work in the police force.<sup>9</sup> Such description of the history of Pakistanis largely matches the depiction by *Offbeat* (2000):

The Pakistanis remained as a unit until 1970 when, with no further recruitment since 1961 when 50 including three men from the Royal Naval dockyard police were the last to be taken on strength, they were decentralized and posted across the very broad spectrum of policing in Hong Kong. Although, for religious reasons, they continued to reside at their traditional base in Fanling...

Some of my informants lived in Fanling until the 1980s and eventually moved out of Fanling or migrated overseas. Recently, Pakistanis who grow up in Fanling have started to re-establish contact once again. Many treasured their experiences in Fanling and kept a number of pictures which they took in Fanling. Through this website, we can have a glimpse of how the first and second-generation migrants of Pakistani Hong Kong royal policemen lived in the past and how they live today. Adaza, 39, is a descendent of Hong Kong policemen and continues to see Fanling as her home. She has very memorable experience of Fanling, even though she does not live there anymore. She was excited to share the pictures on the website Fanlink. The website shows Pakistani children growing up in Fanling and studying in the Pakistani Police Primary School in 1960s. This is how the organizer of Fanlink (2010) describes their community:

A small Pakistani community started when many married Pakistani officers brought their wives from Pakistan to live with them at Police Married Quarters situated in Fanling, New Territories, while a few married with local Chinese women. To cater to the needs of this community a small primary school called Pakistani Police Primary School (PPPS) was created where the late Madam Sultana Razia and the late Mr. Muhammad Iqbal did a marvelous job teaching the children English, Urdu, Mathematics, Science and Pakistani culture. Most of these children could not follow in the footsteps of their

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<sup>9</sup> The description of the contribution of Pakistani policemen in the 1960s was questionable and biased because according to Weiss (1991:434-5), Pakistanis killed many protestors in the violent riots without the permission of the government. This caused disharmony between the Chinese government and the Pakistani High Commissioner in Hong Kong (Weiss 1991:435). This was why the Pakistani Emergency Unit was disbanded by 1970 (Weiss 1991:435).



fathers due to the new entry requirement of written Chinese, although all of them were fluent in spoken Cantonese. Most joined the private sector upon completion of their studies and a lot of them did well in their respective fields and owned businesses, with a few opting to emigrate to Europe and Americas.

These are some of the photos taken by the Pakistanis who lived in Fanling in the 1960s.



Figure 2.1: The late Razia Sultana with Children. Photo taken at the Pakistani Primary school ground in Fanling. Approximate year 1963.

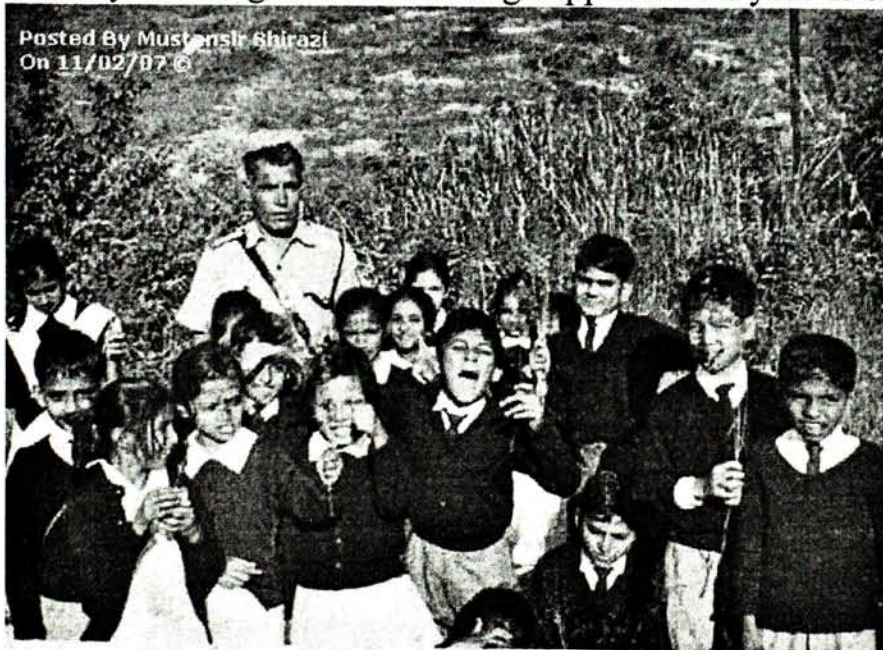


Figure 2.2: Photo taken at Fanling with one of the Pakistani Police officer with Pakistani Primary school children. Approximate year 1963. (Both of the pictures and the descriptions are used with the authorization of Zahir, a descendant of a Pakistani police officer and the organizer of the website, Fanlink.)

However, not all Pakistanis in Hong Kong today are the descendants of Pakistani policemen in Hong Kong. In the post-war period, there were new groups of



South Asian Muslims who migrated to Hong Kong with no affiliation to the British Empire. Let me now discuss another group of Pakistanis who came to Hong Kong to “participate in the economic prosperity of the Colony” (Weiss 1991:433). These Pakistanis came to Hong Kong to work and make money in the 1960s and 1970s. They are the grandfathers or fathers of some of my informants. Most of them came to work as security guards and watchmen. Weiss (1991:436-7) briefly explained how these Pakistanis came to Hong Kong:

To work as a security guard is considered better than as a watchman, as the pay is greater, arms and a uniform are provided, quarters are on the building’s premises, and the employment is steady. Initially, most watchmen earned meager salaries from their jobs as farmworkers or army recruits in Pakistan, which was their motivation for going abroad. Being mostly illiterate, they faced limited options for improving their family’s condition at home. In Pakistan, they knew others (usually policemen or watchmen) who had been successful in Hong Kong. They either sold land or borrowed money for their plane ticket, or worked their way to Hong Kong on freighters. Wives generally were left at home, though occasionally they were brought to Hong Kong when their children were old enough to attend school. While a watchman may occasionally marry a local Chinese woman who converts, the norm is to get married in Pakistan.

Those Pakistanis who came in the post-war period were described as “workaholics” (Weiss 1991:437) – they worked for long hours each day to make money in the hope that one day they would move back to Pakistan. This is confirmed by one of my informants, Asba, aged 26, who I will discuss in later chapters. Asba told me how her father was one of these “workaholics” and dreamed that he would go back to Pakistan to settle down one day. However, he never really moves back to Pakistan but still lives in Hong Kong. Her father came to Hong Kong in the late 1960s when he was 17 years old after he borrowed money and sold a piece of land in Pakistan. He was a watchman at a bank in Hong Kong when he retired. He worked for many years in Hong Kong and left Asba and his other children in Pakistan because he did not have time to take care of them.



One may wonder how these Pakistanis managed to move to Hong Kong without the help of the British. According to my informants, it was fairly easy to move to Hong Kong in the 1960s: Bisharrat said that her father came to Hong Kong in the 1960s and it was very easy to pass the immigration control in Hong Kong – “He just walked into Hong Kong. There was no one who checks his I.D. It was free and easy in the past.” According to Weiss (1991:436), “Seeking new areas in which to earn money, they [Pakistanis] started to come to Hong Kong [to work as security guards]. This was fairly easy until July 1969, when the immigration laws were changed and it became harder for someone without relatives already in Hong Kong to enter legally and stay.” Therefore, in the 1950s and 1960s, Pakistanis could register their permanent resident identities after walking into the borders of Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup>

Since 1969, it has become difficult for Pakistanis to migrate to Hong Kong or simply walk into Hong Kong across the border from mainland China. However, Pakistanis who were born in Hong Kong, but have not lived in Hong Kong for years, could be granted permanent residency upon entering Hong Kong with their birth certificates. Today even Pakistanis with family relations in Hong Kong cannot migrate to Hong Kong easily. They have to wait for several years until their applications for visas made by their relatives living in Hong Kong are successful. Often, Pakistanis’ applications are rejected by the Immigration Department. Some Pakistanis, who do not have family connections with Hong Kong Pakistanis claim to

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<sup>10</sup> Some informants said that their husbands attained permits for residing in Hong Kong after they arrived Hong Kong as “visitors”. Back then, they got the permit to enter Hong Kong at the airport as tourists or visitors. After they reached the Hong Kong airport, Pakistani women who were born in Hong Kong presented their birth certificate at the Immigration control and were later granted Hong Kong Identification cards and British Nationals (Overseas) passports. Their children and husbands who came with them were also granted one-year residence permits.

be asylum seekers upon entering Hong Kong illegally from mainland China.<sup>11</sup>

News about the arrests of illegal immigrants from Pakistan is common (Hong Kong Government News 2007). Transnational marriage and family networks are ways for them to move to Hong Kong, as was the case in Great Britain when immigration policy tightened (Shaw 2000:54).

Pakistanis founded associations such as the Pakistan Trade Commission, the Pakistani Association of Hong Kong and the Islamic Union of Pakistan in the 1950s to strengthen the bond among Pakistanis in Hong Kong (White 1994: 65). These organizations were significant in building South Asian or Pakistani identity (Weiss 1991:441). For example, the Pakistan Trade Commission established in Hong Kong was used to unite “the fledgling Pakistani community”. The Pakistani Association of Hong Kong was officially recognized by the Government in 1960. The Government granted “a plot of land of 22,000 square feet to the Pakistani Association...for a club house” which was completed in 1969 (White 1994:65). Some of these associations built schools for Pakistani children and also provided services for sending the bodies of deceased countrymen to Pakistan (White 1994: 65). Education and recreation, kinship networks, nationalism toward Pakistan, and a sense of identity as Pakistani Muslims were promoted in Hong Kong through these organizations (Weiss 1994:441-448).

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<sup>11</sup> By claiming that they are asylum seekers, Pakistanis will have to wait for the case application by both the Hong Kong government and the UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is a refugee agency, set up by the United Nations General Assembly. “The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people.” (UNHCR 2010). “Refugees and asylum-seekers in Hong Kong do not have the right to work, and asylum-seekers are still subject to arrest and detention.” (UNHCR 2010b). Most asylum seekers are not given enough money by the government to live in Hong Kong. They are not covered and protected in the medical system in Hong Kong. The children cannot go to school because they do not have identity cards or passports. (Society for Community Organization (SoCO) (2006).



We have examined the history and development of the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. The Consulate General estimated that in 1990, there were “about 15,000 people specifically from modern Pakistan in Hong Kong, and the northern Muslim majority identifies with post-1947 Pakistan” (White 1994:142). In 2001, the Consulate General of Pakistan estimated that there were around 20,000 Pakistanis in Hong Kong (South China Morning Post 2002, Ku et al 2003:8). This number was significantly larger than the statistics shown by the Census and Statistics Department in Hong Kong, which estimated that there were only 11,111 Pakistanis in Hong Kong in 2006 (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:16).<sup>12</sup>

Today, most Pakistanis and other ethnic minorities such as the Nepalese have relatively low income (Census and Statistics Department 2007b: 63). The fact that they have low salaries carries a social stigma because they are thought to be a social burden, who abuse social welfare benefits (S.M. Tam 2007). Ku et al (2003:1) write that even though Pakistanis experience hardship and racial discrimination in Hong Kong, policy makers “rarely consider the perspectives of the ethnic minorities”. There are around 5000 Pakistani women in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:24). Over one third of Hong Kong Pakistanis were born in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:34). Around half of the Hong Kong Pakistani population has lived there for over ten years (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:34). Pakistanis comprised 3.2 percent of the ethnic minority population in Hong Kong in 2006 (Census Statistics Department 2007:15). There is a high male to female ratio for Pakistanis aged 45-64: for example, the sex ratio is 3016 males to 1000 females for the age group between 55 and 64 (Census and Statistics 2006b:25). This indicates that a large number of men work in Hong Kong

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<sup>12</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, there were very few publications by the Census and Statistics Department on the exact number of Pakistanis in Hong Kong. This is because they are often grouped with Indians, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans in the censuses.

and leave their wives in other countries (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:19).

Despite the settlement of Pakistanis in Hong Kong for several decades, Pakistanis face various difficulties as an ethnic minority in Hong Kong. They encounter problems making friends with Hong Kong Chinese, and renting private housing (Ku et al 2003: i). They do not have many choices in terms of schools for their children.

According to O.Tam (2007:85), Pakistani children have difficulty learning in Chinese and therefore, they cannot choose most public schools which use Chinese as the medium of teaching. They prefer schools which use English as the medium of teaching. However, Pakistani families choose not to send their children to English Medium Instruction schools, because these schools are more competitive and require higher grades to get in. Chinese Medium Instruction schools are less competitive to get in but it is harder for South Asian children to adapt to the environment. Thus, they can only choose schools which usually take ethnic minority students. These schools are called Non-Chinese Speaking schools. Nevertheless, there are only seven Non-Chinese Speaking schools in Hong Kong.

In terms of work and employment, they engage in rank-and-file occupations and have long working hours, up to 60 hours per week (Ku et al 2003: ii). In addition to these problems, Pakistanis are expected to speak Cantonese because they are economically worse off than other ethnic groups such as Caucasians and Japanese (O. Tam 2007: 49) .<sup>13</sup> Most of my informants do not speak Cantonese fluently, and therefore this creates more problems for them in communication.

Most Pakistanis in Hong Kong are Sunni Muslims. As Muslims, Pakistanis

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<sup>13</sup> O.Tam (2007:49) explains that the language used is closely linked with the class and income group the person belongs to. As the people of "higher-class", such as expats, usually speak English, Pakistanis who are usually poor would have to speak Cantonese.



constitute only a small percentage of the Muslim population in Hong Kong. Today, there are around 180,000 Muslims in Hong Kong, of which 100,000 are Indonesian domestic helpers (Hong Kong Islamic Youth Association 2006). The rest of the Muslim population is mostly Chinese (Hong Kong Islamic Youth Association 2006).<sup>14</sup>

According to the Consulate General of Pakistan, most Pakistanis in Hong Kong are from Punjab, with half being from the Attock and Chakwal areas in Punjab. Most of them speak Punjabi, while a few speak other dialects, usually Pashto. According to my informants, most Pakistani women in Hong Kong are not educated. However, the Pakistani women I interviewed are usually more educated than average Pakistani women in their community – those who cannot speak English and Cantonese may experience more problems than my informants. These Pakistani women who go to community centres are more likely to be able to speak English. Although most of my informants came from rural areas of Pakistan and are lower-class in Hong Kong and Pakistan, I also interviewed Chinese-Pakistani women who are more assimilated to Hong Kong Chinese social circle and is almost disconnected with the lower-class Pakistani women in Hong Kong<sup>15</sup>. There is a 21-year-old Pakistani woman who is an upper-class Saeed in Islamabad and has an Australian-Pakistani husband and lives in middle-upper income housing in Hong Kong. Some Pakistani women who grew up in Hong Kong have very different experiences of life

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<sup>14</sup> “Ethnically, Muslims [excluding the Indonesian Muslims] here have different origins and backgrounds. More than half are of Chinese origin and the rest belong to various ethnic groups. One distinctive feature of ethnic minority Muslims in Hong Kong is that most of them have been living in Hong Kong for several generations, and have acquired the local culture and dialect. However, many of them can trace back their original ancestry to the Indian subcontinent (Pakistan, India), and to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Arabia and Africa.” (Ho 2001)

<sup>15</sup> A Chinese-Pakistani woman, 32, teaches mathematics and lives with her boyfriend. She told me that she can choose two identities. She speaks fluent Cantonese and her father, who is a Pakistani born in Vietnam, only talks to her in Cantonese. She said, “The Chinese in America does not speak Chinese too. So don’t think that I am really Pakistanis, I am just half...I am mixed...I live in Hong Kong. I think I know enough about the Pakistani stuff. In long term, I will live in Hong Kong, so I think that if I know the basic things about Pakistan, it is ok.”

than the women who still visit their hometown in Pakistan where they grew up. Those women in the twenties growing up in Hong Kong with their family in Hong Kong have distinct differences from the women who migrated to Hong Kong right before or after their marriage in Pakistan. For the women who grew up in Hong Kong, Pakistan is a place where they or their parents come from but not a place where they actually live for many years. When they visit Pakistan, they go back as the second or third generations of Pakistanis who migrated overseas. However, the Pakistani women who have come to Hong Kong in recent decades have a stronger connection with Pakistan than those who grew up in Hong Kong.

There are three major reasons that Pakistanis reside in Hong Kong today. They are descendents of workers in the colonial era, blood-relatives of immigrants or illegal immigrants.

### **Descendents of the Workers in the Colonial Era**

The descendents of workers in the colonial era are diverse. According to my interviews with the Consulate General of Pakistan on 21 August 2009, they include Indians who worked for the East India Company. As mentioned, these workers might come from Lahore and Campbellpur as early as the 1820s, which are now in Pakistan (White 1994:59). Even though they are from the same areas of Pakistan as later arrivals, they may recognize themselves as South Asian Muslims or Indians rather than as Pakistanis. Some of them have thrived economically and socially and therefore they do not seem to socialize with the majority of Pakistanis who came after World War II. Those who have lived in Hong Kong for a few generations may also have adapted to the lifestyle and culture of Hong Kong Chinese. For instance, they may have boyfriends or girlfriends before marriage and watch Hong Kong Chinese television dramas and listen to Canto-pop music in Hong Kong. Sometimes,



some of my informants may refuse to recognize them as authentic “Pakistanis” because they may have lost their religious beliefs as Muslims. Thus, my informants often are not in the same social circle of these South Asian Muslims. Other descendents of the colonial era workers are the children and grandchildren of policemen or prison guards recruited from Pakistan (previously part of India). They came to Hong Kong in the 1950s and some of my informants are the descendents of these policemen.

### **Blood-relatives of Immigrants**

The second group I discuss is the immigrants who are blood relatives of Pakistanis in Hong Kong and migrated to Hong Kong through the assistance of their family members. Some Pakistanis moved to Hong Kong because their fathers or brothers worked in Hong Kong and encouraged them to come to Hong Kong.<sup>16</sup> Most of these migrants came to Hong Kong for employment and family reunion. However, family unification is not the major reason: some Pakistanis prefer to move to Hong Kong for further education and job opportunities. They came to Hong Kong alone. Although their parents are Hong Kong permanent residents and gave birth to them in Hong Kong, their parents prefer to live in Pakistan, where they have retired.

### **Illegal Migrants**

The last group are the “fortune-hunters” who come to Hong Kong illegally. The Consul General of Consulate General of Pakistan, Dr Ahmad Balal, said,

A typical story of fortune hunters would be like this: The young men in their late or early teenage years beg their fathers to sell a piece of land and borrow some money from relatives so that they can go to Hong Kong. They use the money to pay the agents who get the visas to China. These young men travel to China with fake visas to Guangzhou and take a boat from mainland China

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<sup>16</sup> One common tactic for the immigrants to move to Hong Kong is to claim that their uncles are their fathers and then apply for visas to live in Hong Kong.

to Hong Kong. If they are caught, the immigration officers will send them to see me. I give them a one-day passport and send them back to Pakistan. This happens every day!

Recently, some illegal immigrants from Pakistan were caught in a sampan by the Hong Kong Police (Lo 2009). This seems to prove what the Consul General said: fortune hunters continued to come to Hong Kong for economic reasons. Some may stay in Hong Kong and work illegally as construction workers or in other jobs (Hong Kong Government News 2007).

To sum up the preceding pages, some Punjabi Muslims were recruited by the British to work in Hong Kong as security forces. As these Punjabi Muslims performed well, the British continued to recruit Pakistanis after World War II to work as policemen in Hong Kong. Some of the descendants of these Pakistanis continue to live in Hong Kong. They may bring their relatives to Hong Kong, and some may marry Pakistanis from Pakistan and bring their spouses and children to Hong Kong. There are also a number of Pakistanis who come to Hong Kong illegally for economic reasons. In addition, there are also a number of Pakistanis or Punjabi Muslims who came to Hong Kong for business and worked throughout the past decades. Those who have thrived and led upper-middle-class lives after settling in Hong Kong for generations seem to have different life experiences than those Pakistani women who are poor and migrated to Hong Kong in recent years.

## **Transnational Pakistani Women**

The Pakistani women I consider in this research are those who travel back and forth between Hong Kong and Pakistan frequently. Let me briefly explain some features of these women. They have frequent contact with their relatives in Pakistan or other countries, and are closely connected with them through arranged marriage,



family care and investment.

Some of them are descendents of the workers in the colonial era, but they have lived in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. For example, some informants' fathers worked in Hong Kong for the British government in the police unit. These informants were born in Hong Kong but were raised in Pakistan because their parents sent them to Pakistan because of the lower cost of living. They hold Hong Kong permanent residency because their parents are Hong Kong permanent residents. Some lived in Pakistan until they got married. After they got married they came back to Hong Kong and settled in the territory with their husbands. Some continue to travel back and forth between Hong Kong and Pakistan for work and family. For example, their children may be left in Pakistan with their grandparents and these women's retired parents may also be in Pakistan. Since the economy of Hong Kong is better than that of Pakistan, these informants continue to be financial supporters of their in-laws and other relatives. Thus, complaints about the demands of their in-laws are very common during interviews with these women.

Other transnational Pakistani women are bride migrants who move to Hong Kong because they married Hong Kong Pakistanis. These bride migrants usually have very close connections with their relatives in Pakistan because they have left their relatives in Pakistan and migrated to Hong Kong with their husbands. These migrants may have more difficulties in adapting to life in Hong Kong because they are not familiar with the living environment. They also lack family support in Hong Kong. Instead, they rely on their relatives in Pakistan to support them emotionally, while their husbands support their relatives in Pakistan financially.

Among my informants who are transnational Pakistani women, eleven are locally-born Pakistani women who were raised in both Hong Kong and Pakistan;

eight are bride migrants who came with their husbands to Hong Kong.

## Conclusion

South Asian Muslims came to Hong Kong in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Few Pakistani women in Hong Kong are the descendants of these South Asian Muslims because the British Empire did not allow these South Asian Muslims to bring their wives and children to Hong Kong before World War II. After World War II, the South Asian Muslims were replaced by Pakistanis, who were recruited to Hong Kong to work in the police force or prison services. These recruits brought their wives and children from Pakistan to Hong Kong. Today, it appears that Pakistanis who came to Hong Kong after World War II to work or reunite with their family members comprise the majority of Pakistani population in Hong Kong.

Pakistanis lead humble lives in Hong Kong. They have relatively low income and are an ethnic minority in Hong Kong. They are racially discriminated against by Hong Kong Chinese (Ku 2003:1) even though half of the Pakistani population in Hong Kong has lived in Hong Kong for over ten years. Pakistani men usually have difficulties in communicating with Hong Kong Chinese. They have not yet integrated, assimilated or been accepted as local Hongkongese by the Hong Kong Chinese

Some Hong Kong Pakistanis are the descendants of colonial officials. Some are blood relatives of these descendants. Others were illegal immigrants who came to Hong Kong for economic reasons. My informants are those Pakistani women who regularly travel back and forth between Hong Kong and Pakistan. These women have spent their lives in both places and retain close transnational connections with their relatives in Pakistan.

In the next three chapters, I will discuss further how these Pakistani women



live in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. In Chapter 3, I will explore how they live differently in terms of the living environment, family system and social status.

## Chapter 3

### The Lives of Pakistani Women in Hong Kong and Pakistan

#### Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the historical background of Pakistani women in Hong Kong whereas this chapter and the following Chapters 4 and 5 examine how Pakistani women live in Hong Kong and Pakistan. In this chapter I first explore the lives of Pakistani women from rural areas in Pakistan by giving accounts of my experience in a village in Pakistan and comparing it with the overcrowded living experience in Hong Kong. Although Pakistani women have to live in cramped spaces in Hong Kong, they enjoy substantial institutional support in Hong Kong. An understanding of the rural lives of Pakistani women in Pakistan and their institutionally supported lives in Hong Kong is crucial to making sense of the contrasting experience for Pakistani women between the two places. I analyze the lives of Pakistani women in joint family residence in Pakistan and nuclear family residence in Hong Kong.<sup>17</sup> The change of residence pattern is a common experience of many Pakistani women, which distinguishes them from their counterparts in Pakistan. However, they cannot leave the joint family system entirely and continue to fulfill the expectations of their joint family members. I also discuss the lives of Pakistani women, who are an ethnic minority and lower class in Hong Kong on the

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<sup>17</sup> Joint family system, "(i)n its ideal form,...includes a married couple, their sons, their sons' wives and children, and unmarried offspring. Daughters live with their parents until marriage; it is expected that sons will live with their parents their whole lives in the joint family system. Sons often establish separate households upon their father's death" (Weiss 2006:160). There are obligations of mutual care for the members in the joint family. "The ideology of the joint family is one of interdependent obligations of mutual care that extend from parents to children and from adult children to their parents" (Harris and Shaw 2009:108). By nuclear family residence, I refer to the households where the family does not have any extended family members residing together. In Hong Kong, 74% of the Pakistani households are of this kind (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:94).



one hand, while as overseas returnees they are perceived as middle class when they return to Pakistan. This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the lives of Pakistani women in terms of their living environment, family system and social status in these two places.

## **Rural Lifestyle in Pakistan**

During my visit to Adaza's husband's village in summer 2009, I explored how Adaza lived when she was in Pakistan. The following are the field notes from the first day of my arrival in Pakistan in July 2009, which can give a glimpse of the lives of Pakistani women in general because most lead rural lifestyles in Pakistan.

When Adaza's family's van drove to her home from the airport, there was farmland and houses scattered on the two sides of the road. As we entered the village, the van was on a bumpy, narrow road, where there were occasionally some big piles of trash on the side of the road. Still, I would say that the road is rather well-paved. Before the van stopped at the main entrance of her house, I heard dogs bark and saw a few cows tied with strings to the trees. When the gate opened and the van entered the courtyard, I saw a 1000-square-foot green garden and at least twenty people waiting for us. This house is very spacious. This is a sharp contrast with Adaza's tiny flat (which is to most Hong Kong people, normal size), of around 500 square feet.

Adaza asked her children to show me around her house. Then, I realized that the house I was in was the old one, in which her in-laws sleep. She built a new house next to the old one, houses connected to each other through a small door. The new house was two stories high with three extraordinarily large bedrooms, each of over 300 square feet. All the walls were newly painted in white. The kitchens were already equipped with a new fridge and microwave oven and so on, but the rooms on the second floor still seemed quite empty because there was no furniture. I climbed the stairs to the rooftop and saw the fields surrounding the house. The view was spectacular....The house next to us was rather shabby, as if it was made of mud....Suddenly, the wind blew very hard and the sand went into our hair and eyes. We could barely see anything and talk so we quickly went back inside the house.

This description shows that Adaza has a spacious house, which is one of the best designed houses in the village. Her lifestyle in Pakistan largely reflects the rural lifestyle of other Hong Kong Pakistani women like her. This is because among the nearly 5000 Pakistani women in Hong Kong, many are from rural agricultural areas.



This urban-rural contrast affects Pakistani migrants – “not just in living standards and styles of work and of education, but in ways of acting and thinking” (Shaw 2000:4). The lifestyle of Pakistanis who come from rural areas is more or less similar to what Weiss (2006:146) described, which matches what I observed in Pakistan:

Lifestyles in rural areas for many Pakistanis remain physically similar to those of their grandparents and great-grandparents: living in mud huts, sleeping on *charpai* [literally “four legs”, which means string beds], walking to work in the fields, getting stoneware from the village potter and cloth from one of the village weavers, and cooking over an open fire. But what often is different is the paved road that leads from the main road to most villages, the buses and trucks that can transport people and goods long distances, smaller families (4 to 5 siblings, down from 9 to 10), and the electric fans that make life in the hot season just a bit more endurable. Today, the vast majority of villages have been “electrified,” though as in cities, brownouts remain frequent. Few people can afford to purchase or run a refrigerator...

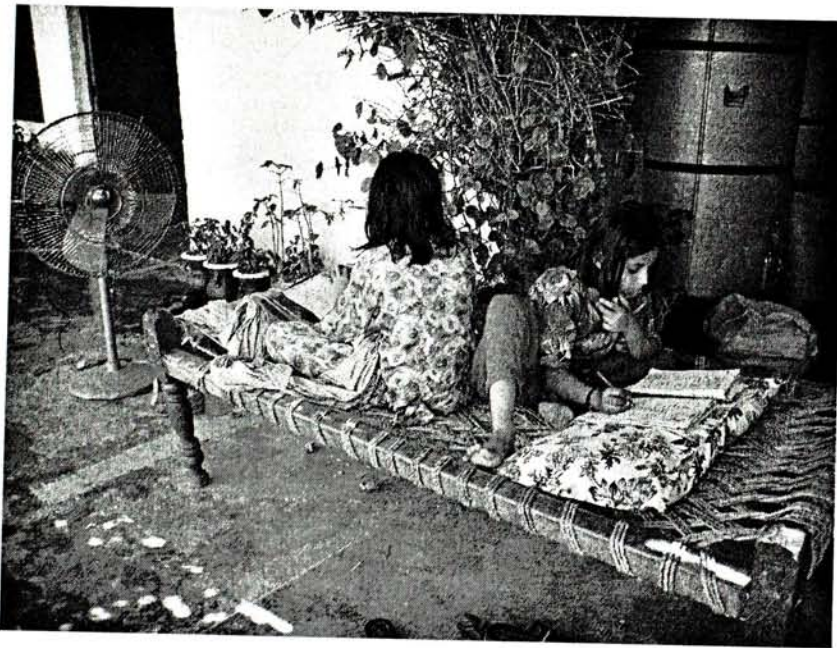


Figure 3.1: *Charpai* (string beds) are found in every house in the village – sometimes in the gardens of the houses of my informants who live in the cities, something which would be impossible to have in Hong Kong because of the cramped space.





Figure 3.2: Pakistani children from Hong Kong playing with calves belonging to their grandfather. It is their first time to be so close to nature and live in a very spacious house because they live in a 500-square-foot public housing flat in Hong Kong with eight family members.

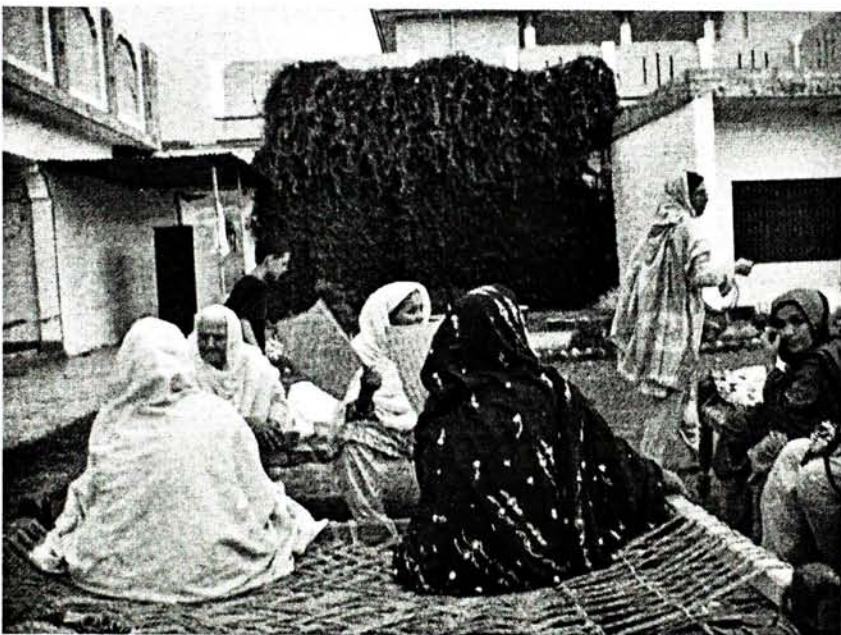


Figure 3.3: Pakistani women sitting and chatting in the courtyard of the house. While the older women are chatting, the children are playing in the courtyard with their crickets or chickens, which they have newly “adopted” as their pets.



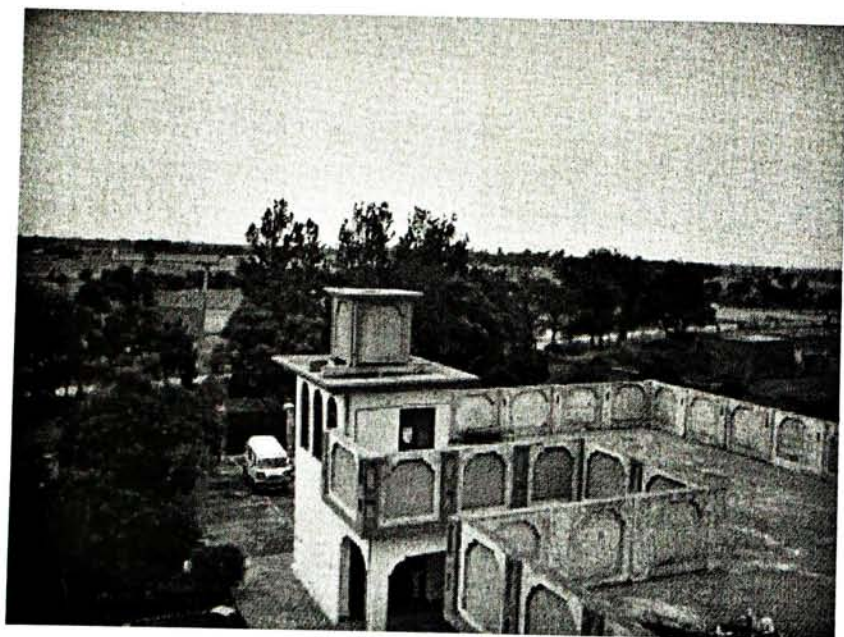


Figure 3.4: Adaza's in laws' house in a village near Wah Cantt.<sup>18</sup> This photo is taken from the rooftop of Adaza's new house. We can see how spacious the house is, which is much more spacious than Pakistani women's flats in Hong Kong.

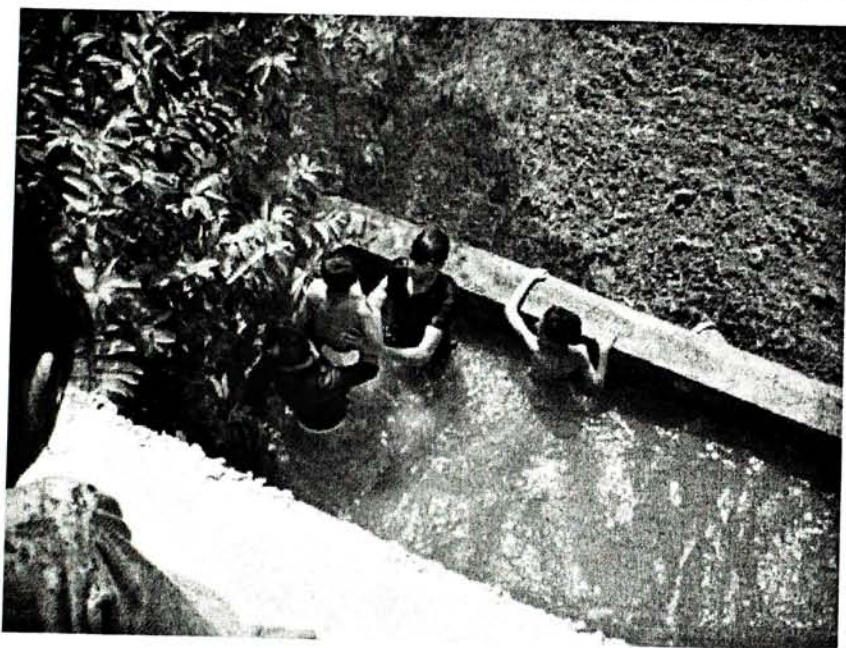


Figure 3.5: Male children and young men play in the water tank of the house at the front while the girls watch them from the rooftop. The water system is financed by the remittances from Adaza's husband in Hong Kong. This is the evidence of how Pakistani women's husbands in Hong Kong improve the living standard of their relatives in villages in Pakistan.

The houses I stayed at in when I was in Pakistan were built with bricks and concrete, and were equipped with natural gas or petroleum stoves, refrigerators, cooling fans and air-coolers.<sup>19</sup> Although Adaza has equipped her in-laws' house with

<sup>18</sup> Wah Cantt is the commonly known name of Wah Cantonment, which is a military city near Hassanabdal. It is around 50km away from the northwest of Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.

<sup>19</sup> To use the fan or the "air-cooler", water has to fill the machine's water tank in order to make the air cool. This air-cooler is extremely large and can be given as part of a woman's dowry.



various electronic appliances, the depiction by Weiss above is largely true for the village where I stayed. The rural life of Pakistani women is a big contrast to their urban life in Hong Kong in terms of the household appliances used at home and the space for leisure and doing housework.

The major differences in terms of technology between Pakistan and Hong Kong are that electrical appliances are not readily available in small towns in Pakistan and the supply of electricity is not stable. Most washing machines found in the market in the nearby town, Wah Cantt, in Pakistan are not automatic, which means that the last step of rinsing the soap or detergent has to be done by hand. The non-automatic machine does not offer much help in saving time in washing clothes, but automatic washing machines are not affordable for lower-class families. Even if Pakistanis in the village can afford a non-automatic washing machine, they cannot use it anytime they want – the electricity is cut every two hours in the village where I was, and the situation is apparently even worse elsewhere. The supply of electricity in Rawalpindi or other big cities is far better than in villages. In Rawalpindi, an upper-middle-class family like Asba's family can afford three air conditioners (See Chapter 1 for her background). Electricity is almost always available there, except one or two hours at night. But this is not the case in villages.

We have discussed the rural lifestyle and spacious living environment of Pakistani women in Pakistan. Let me now compare this experience with that in Hong Kong so that we can understand more about the living environment of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is largely urbanized and Pakistanis have to live in very cramped flats. This is a picture which illustrates the living environment and small flats of Pakistani women in Hong Kong.



Figure 3.6: Pakistani families often live in very crowded flats in Hong Kong. In this picture, the clothes hang in the middle of the flat because there is no space for drying clothes. (Fanlink 2010)

Pakistani women have little space in urban Hong Kong and most of my informants told me that they did not like to live in Hong Kong because of the small flats. They did not feel it easy to adapt to the tiny flats in the old buildings in the older parts of Hong Kong where they had to live when they first arrived in Hong Kong. They usually have a large family size, which makes it harder for them to adapt to the crowded living environment. Most of my married informants have at least three to four children. However, in terms of the housework they need to do, it is better for them to have small flats to take care of because they are often the person in the flat who is responsible for most of the housework. For some of my informants who have teenage daughters, they have their daughters' help in doing housework including cooking and cleaning. This also eases their pressure in living in a nuclear family household in Hong Kong.

Indeed, Hong Kong is a convenient place for living in terms of ease in obtaining the latest technology, stable electricity supply, high-quality household products and a cheap and fast transportation system. In this chapter, due to space limitations, I do not discuss how convenient it is for Pakistani women to live in Hong



Kong in these respects, which are rather easy to understand. Instead, I show how Pakistani women enjoy substantial social welfare support in Hong Kong, something that contrasts with their lives in Pakistan.

### **Institutionally Supported Lives in Hong Kong**

While Pakistani women live in very tiny and crowded flats in Hong Kong, there are also a variety of social services provided to the South Asian community by the Hong Kong government or social services organizations, which compensate for the lack of physical space. Over half of my informants make use of these community services and seek help from governmental or non-governmental organizations. These services are not freely available in the Pakistani villages where my informants come from, whereas these women can make use of these services to improve their lives in Hong Kong. They are well aware of the social welfare benefits or community services in Hong Kong. Jannat looks for free training courses, such as yoga, English and computer classes. She said, "I applied for a Microsoft computing course at Employees Retraining Board (ERB). I will learn how to write business letters." In addition, most of my informants live in public housing estates and apply for government subsidy for their children's transportation fees. They are also aware of medical services provided at low cost in Hong Kong because the medical services in Pakistan are expensive or unavailable. Once, when I visited Bapsi in Hong Kong, she told me that there were some social workers visiting her and introducing her to medical check-ups especially for South Asian women in Hong Kong in Nethersole Hospital. A friend of Bapsi went for the Pap smear check for cervical cancer and raised the concern for the prevention of cancer. She said, "You cannot get these services in Pakistan but these are available in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom."

Not all Pakistani women make good use of the services from governmental and non-governmental organizations in Hong Kong. Some of these women do not speak Cantonese and may have difficulties to communicate with doctors or social workers. In some cases, there are cultural differences between them and Hong Kong Chinese. The communication between these women and the people who may offer help are not effective all the time. They may not be able to make use of these governmental or non-governmental services effectively. Some Pakistani women think that they do not need these services and may seek help within their own social circle or save money for their own use in housing and medical services, rather than using the government ones.

Some Pakistani women abuse the welfare system in order to have a better standard of living. For example, I heard of a number of Pakistani women who pretend to be divorced to get welfare benefits from the Social Welfare Department.<sup>20</sup> Sabira said that some Pakistanis in Hong Kong recognize religious divorce, but not legal divorce. Divorces do not happen as easily in Pakistan because if women divorce their husbands in Pakistan, they cannot gain any financial support from the government as they would in Hong Kong (see Chapter 5 for a divorce case between Hong Kong and Pakistan).<sup>21</sup> Sabira said,

Nowadays, in Hong Kong, most Pakistani women divorce just on paper. Their husbands want to earn some money from the government. Legally, they are divorced but the husband still lives in the house. They think like this: 'We just do the paper divorce because we have financial problems. It is okay. It is

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<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, if Pakistani women get divorced, they have to accept the consequences. This is because divorced Pakistani women bear stigma as rebellious women because others may think that they could not get along with their husbands. Therefore, these divorced Pakistani women in Hong Kong may be gossiped about and have to be very careful when they go out alone. It is generally believed that, as depicted on televisions and in films, a Pakistani woman who "strays from traditional norms...faces insurmountable problems and becomes alienated from her family" (Weiss 2006:163).

<sup>21</sup> The law of divorce of Pakistan shows that the Family Court should put the issues about the maintenance of the wives and children on the first priority (Kakakhel Law Associates 2008). However, according to my informants, there are no social welfare benefits provided to divorced women in Pakistan.



Hong Kong, not Pakistan.' They do so to earn some more money....When a woman applies for the public housing, she claims herself as a single mother. After the housing department gives her a flat, the officials do not come to check them again. Even if the social workers go to visit the single-parent families, they will inform the divorcees first, so that the Pakistani women can ask their husbands to leave the flat and clear the evidence of living together with their husbands. As they believe in religious divorce, you can ask these Pakistani men, in front of Imam [priest], to say, "I'm giving the divorce to my wife." Otherwise, on paper, they shut their mouth and sign the paper. Signing is not a problem for them. If they are living in Pakistan, they are not thinking about divorce because they cannot get any financial support from the government.

Sabira claimed that the divorce rates for Pakistanis in Hong Kong have risen in recent years because some of them abuse the legal system in Hong Kong for the extra income. However, some women who really need to get divorced are protected under the legal system in Hong Kong. This is because Pakistani women are usually housewives and do not have any income. If they get divorced, they need the financial assistance from non-governmental organizations and government, which they can get in Hong Kong but not in Pakistan.

If Pakistani women are active in gaining social welfare in Hong Kong, they tend to have greater protection and access to social assistance than their female relatives in Pakistan. Such protection or access to social aid is made possible in Hong Kong because of the following factors: successful rule of law, high quality education, corruption-free government, low-cost medical care, social welfare resources, and a largely crime-free environment in Hong Kong.<sup>22</sup> To a large extent, by living in Hong Kong, most Pakistani women have more chances to change their lifestyles than they would have had in Pakistan because the institutional support is more comprehensive for lower-income groups and is fairer than that in Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistani women may become freer in Hong Kong because there are more opportunities for

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<sup>22</sup> In terms of quality of education, my informants said that the Hong Kong education system is much better than Pakistan's. However, the education policies for South Asians or other ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are controversial issues. Also, South Asians still have a lower rate of university entry (O.Tam 2007).

them to participate in activities organized by community centres, which are not found in villages in Pakistan. Nevertheless, some Pakistani women are not active in community centers nor do they work. They may not have extensive social networks like other Pakistani women who are educated, employed or active (Ku et al 2003:45). The less active ones are also covered in this research through the network of the active informants.

To sum up, my informants whom I visited lead rural lifestyles in Pakistan, where the houses are large and facilities are basic. However, they live in tiny flats in Hong Kong, where there are various social services and welfare benefits for people in need. In the next section, I discuss how Pakistani women lead different lives between the joint family in Pakistan and nuclear family in Hong Kong.

### **The Joint Family in Pakistan**

In the Pakistani cultural context, the family is usually a joint family. Women stay at home while men work outside. Pakistani men and women have clear gender roles to play at home. The formation and continuity of joint family residence depends upon family harmony, resources, financial circumstances, and the separation of family members between rural areas and urban areas. According to Weiss (2006:160),

For most people, family loyalty overrides other obligations; the overwhelming importance of family ties retains its significance even among the most Westernized members of the elite. The family is the basis of social organization and provides its members both identity and protection. The honor or shame of individual members – particularly of female members – affects the general standing of a family in the greater community...Descent is considered patrilineally, and the *biradari* (patrilineage) plays a significant role in social and political relations...*Biradari* members often live in close proximity in rural areas....members of a *biradari* celebrate life events together.

Therefore, the joint family system is important for Pakistani women to celebrate their life events or festivals and give support to one another.



Most of my informants have lived in joint families since they were small, or as a daughter-in-law today. Even though they may not live with their in-laws, they may have frequent contact with their joint family members, such as cousins, father's sisters or mother's brothers and so on. Within the joint family, "(t)he young bride has very little status in her husband's household" (Weiss 2006:162). The young bride "is subservient to her mother-in-law, and has little influence on her husband's activities." (Weiss 2006:162). Sometimes the brother-in-law and the mother-in-law are the people who have influence in the family and may have conflicts with the Pakistani women I interviewed. A mother often has more influence on her son than the daughter-in-law ever has on her husband (Weiss 2006:160). Thus, most informants are worried about or fear their roles as daughters-in-law since they have experienced family conflicts between them and their in-laws (also see Chapter 5).

## **The Nuclear Family in Hong Kong**

When Pakistani women live in Hong Kong, it is difficult for them to practice joint family residence in their tiny flats. Thus the joint family residence is not common among the Pakistani households in Hong Kong. Sabira explained this:

In Pakistan, you live with your brothers and sisters. When your brother gets married, his wife moves in the house and she has to live together with her in-laws. Sometimes the family members cannot control their emotions – the daughters-in-law or sisters-in-law fight with one another. To avoid fighting, some men like to live separately with their own family. The house is very small here in Hong Kong, so after having one or two children, the new family cannot live together with the older generations. The new family has to move out. Some Pakistanis can apply for one more flat in the public housing estate. The change of environment [the fact that Pakistanis move to Hong Kong] makes them adopt to the culture of Hong Kong. You know Auntie B? She lives with her daughter-in-law but when her grandson gets married, he may move out with his wife. When your son and you live separately, it is good. You two can live nearby but separately. Then, you have more love and there are fewer conflicts.

Most of my informants think that the nuclear family residence can reduce



conflicts between different generations and with in-laws in Hong Kong. Sabira implies that the relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law may improve because they do not live together in Hong Kong.

In a nuclear family, my informants' husbands are usually the heads of their households but sometimes my informants have decision-making power and autonomy, if their husbands are willing to share power with them. Therefore, my informants tend to have more freedom and control over how their families are run in Hong Kong, than they used to have in Pakistan. In Pakistan, my informants used to rely on their eldest brother-in-law (their husbands are in Hong Kong) to buy all the necessities outside, whereas in Hong Kong, they can ask their husbands to buy and pay for what is necessary for the home. In Hong Kong, they can also go outside home to shop and buy the things they need from the supermarkets, without the control of the parents-in-law. This is because Hong Kong is a safe society for women to move around but Pakistan is dangerous for women to go out alone. The Pakistani women I interviewed often say that male strangers in Pakistan may make comments about them, which make them feel uncomfortable and sexually harassed.<sup>23</sup> However, they think that the majority Hong Kong Chinese would not do so to them. Hong Kong is mostly safe for these women. As Pakistani women experienced changing social environment in Hong Kong, we can thus see the roles of Pakistan women change as they live in a nuclear family in safe Hong Kong.

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<sup>23</sup> Sabria talked about the Pakistani men who sexually harassed her. "Once when I was in Kowloon Park with my friends, a man came forward, talked to my friends and touched her. She screamed. I threw my shoe at him! When my father arrived, I asked him to chase after the man....Another man asked me if I want to have tea with him...and said he had a private room nearby. I gave him a slap in his face!"

Sabria also talked about how some Pakistani men crave women in Hong Kong. She warned me to stay away from these men and protect myself. Pakistani women, or all women, should protect themselves by dressing "properly". "The Pakistani old men are very dangerous. They look at women like hungry dogs. They look for Pakistani, Nepalese, or Indonesian women. Now they look for Indonesian women more because they think that Indonesian women are cheap....If you go to Chungking Mansion, they think that you are prostitutes....So next time when you go to Chungking Mansion, be careful, wear a big *dupata* and don't go alone."



### **From Joint Family to Nuclear Family: Changing Roles in Family**

In this section, I discuss how a Pakistani woman, Adaza, experiences the difficulties of living in the joint family household in Pakistan. I also discuss how she feels liberated in the nuclear family household in Hong Kong. This section is essential for us to understand one of the major changes that most Pakistani women have experienced when they go back to Pakistan for a visit after they moved from Pakistan to Hong Kong.

After Adaza got married in 1990, she and her husband lived in Pakistan together for the first four years of their marriage. However, her husband wanted to go to Hong Kong to work and make more money. In 1994, Adaza and her husband along with their three-year-old daughter went to Hong Kong, hoping to improve their living standard. Ever since Adaza's husband worked in Hong Kong, their living standard has improved: Adaza said that her husband earned around HKD30,000 per month before 1997 when the economy was quite good. There were numerous buildings under construction, which required many construction workers. Adaza's husband was very skilled at welding and therefore earned quite a good income at that time. However, the improvement of living standard did not come without cost. Adaza found herself spending over a decade as an "astronaut". She commuted between Hong Kong and Pakistan every year to take care of her children in Pakistan and meet her husband in Hong Kong. In order to save more money in Hong Kong, Adaza's husband asked her to stay in Pakistan and take care of the children. When she lived in Pakistan in the 1990s, she only spent one tenth of the expenditure that she would have had to if she had lived in Hong Kong.

Adaza spent most of the time in her in-laws' home without the support of her husband. She faced very bad treatment by her eldest brother-in-law and his wife. She

said that her brother-in-law controlled all the finances – after her husband sent money to Pakistan, her brother-in-law bought daily necessities for the joint family household. Thus, Adaza had no say over what to buy and did not have any cash with her unless her husband gave her cash when he visited Pakistan or her parents gave her money.<sup>24</sup> As a result, she did not receive any money through her brother-in-law. She also complained that her brother-in-law's wife did not give her children enough milk to drink, as her husband was too far away to save her from this daily conflict. She also faced daily challenges from her mother-in-law, and shared the household work with the other sisters-in-law without the comfort or support of her husband in the house because he was in Hong Kong. She wanted to speak up for herself, but without her husband to stand by her side in the house, she was disadvantaged when compared to other sisters-in-law. Thus, when Adaza was left in Pakistan, it was difficult for her to live with her in-laws.

After six years of separation from her husband, Adaza finally brought her youngest children to Hong Kong and prepared to settle in Hong Kong in 2000. This was triggered by the death of her parents, who had supported her emotionally and financially while her husband was away from Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> However, she did not move to Hong Kong once and for all. After five years, she finally settled in Hong Kong with her nuclear family members (her children and husband). Her life in Hong Kong is therefore very different from those of her sisters-in-law in the joint family system in Pakistan. When Adaza went back to Pakistan in summer 2009 for two months, she did not have to do housework in the joint family household. However, she had to

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<sup>24</sup> As Ross (1961:65) said, when the father has to be away from home for the job, the other male members "will take over many of the father's responsibilities". It seems that the roles of the women do not face a big change when the husband left the household.

<sup>25</sup> Most of my informants have reflected that the support of the natal family members remains important even after they get married. Their parents continue to offer emotional and financial support to them.



clean her own house as her husband built another house right next to his father's house. While she has to do the daily shopping, cleaning and cooking in a flat of 500 square feet in Hong Kong, she claimed that she did not know how to do housework in a 6000-square-foot house in Pakistan. She no longer had to share one single cleaning or cooking task in her in-laws' house, although she ate with her sisters-in-law and nieces. Even though she bore the responsibility only for herself and her children in her new house, she found it hard to adapt to the heavy workload in Pakistan. During her stay in Pakistan, I found that she could go out freely to visit old neighbors and relatives but the other sisters-in-law stayed at home. Most of the women in the village are not supposed to leave their house frequently, unless they have to visit their sick family members or help the natal family for weddings and funerals. However, Adaza did not need to give any reasons or excuses for leaving the house. She just came back for a short visit and thus her relatives expected her to see old friends and relatives every day. She acted differently from other sisters-in-law because she is not a member of the joint family household. Migration allows her and other Pakistani women alike to transform their roles in a joint family.

The changes of roles for Adaza in a joint family can be seen through the distribution of housework, physical mobility and the setting up of a new separate household. Adaza's husband's building a house was seen as legitimate by her in-laws. Any overseas Pakistani who can afford to build a house in one's hometown is welcomed by in-laws because this improves the living standard and status of relatives in the village. However, Adaza's sisters-in-law who wanted to build a new kitchen to avoid sharing housework in the household did not get the permission from their father-in-law. He was very angry at the construction of a new kitchen and said that they could only have a separate kitchen after he died. However, Adaza had a

legitimate reason to not only have a separate kitchen but also a separate house because she is richer than the other sisters-in-law, and her husband contributes to the finance of the joint family.

Indeed, Adaza knew that she must guard her interest in the joint family household. She said,

I will lock the doors so that they cannot go into my house when I go back to Hong Kong. [I asked, 'How about your new washing machine?' She just bought it for HKD4200.] Yes. I will also put the washing machine from the garden into the house....They broke the video camera which my husband bought last time. I also have to take care of my own house, so that I have a good place to stay when I live in Pakistan.

We can thus see from Adaza's case that even though she has moved out of the joint family by living in Hong Kong, she still faces financial and material demands from her in-laws in Pakistan. Likewise, Noshaba, 26, told me that her husband is responsible for the finance of his family in Pakistan. This means that he has to support seven family members in Pakistan. Nevertheless, he only earns HKD7000 a month as a driver. Their relatives in Pakistan rely on them to send remittances for the following: building new houses, buying new vans or cars, paying for their nieces' dowry and medication for the elderly at home. Maria, 22, complained that her in-laws ask for money every month. She said, "Sometimes they ask for PKR35,000 (HKD3500). Sometimes they ask for PKR60,000 (HKD6000), but my husband only earns HKD14,000 and we have three children to feed. Once, my sister-in-law asked me to buy her clothes in Hong Kong. I wondered: Why doesn't she ask her husband to buy them for her?" Pakistani women in Hong Kong tend to adapt to nuclear family residence and dislike the joint family system because of the demands it continually places on them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> However, the relationship between the families in Hong Kong and in Pakistan do not seem to break unless there something very unusual were to happen. So far I have not heard of stories of Pakistanis disconnecting with their relatives in Pakistan because of the financial demands from the Pakistan side.



Despite the fact that they have moved out of the joint family household, Pakistani women still have to take care of two households – one in Hong Kong and one in Pakistan. Living in Hong Kong does not mean that they discontinue their relationship with their kin in Pakistan. They experience double lives and difficulties between the two places: they may enjoy more freedom and be the person-in-charge in Hong Kong but they cannot assume such roles and freedom in Pakistan. They also have to fulfill the obligations as daughters-in-law by supporting their kin materially through remittances (see Chapter 5). However, some informants favor the joint family system because they feel alone in Hong Kong. An informant who is in her mid-twenties and is married to a Hong Kong Chinese feels happier to live in a joint family system. This is because she stays at her mother's flat where she feels emotionally supported if she goes back to Pakistan.

The bonding between these migrant Pakistani women and their family members, particularly in-laws in Pakistan, is also affected by their role and status in the family. As time goes by, Pakistani women who were exploited, such as Adaza in the past, are no longer new and inferior in the family. She is no longer the young bride exploited by her older sister-in-law. Rather, she is the mature woman who can make decisions for her daughters' marriages. She becomes the mother-in-law or the auntie, having more authority in the family, and selecting potential sons-in-law. She does not want to entertain the demands from her in-laws in Pakistan anymore. The status of the women will also affect their views of joint or nuclear family households.

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Instead, the one story of cutting almost all connections between the Pakistan and Hong Kong side was due to divorce. Sabira broke connections with her mother for years after her mother divorced her father when Sabira was three years old. However, Sabira managed to find her mother after she moved from Pakistan to Hong Kong 14 years ago: her mother lived in Hong Kong. My informants seem to have a strong linkage with their relatives in Pakistan even though they are far apart and have left their hometown for many years. I believe that arranged marriages between Pakistan and Hong Kong help connect the families in both places. Indeed, the family connections between relatives in Hong Kong and Pakistan are also very strong through international phone calls and visits back to Pakistan.

The younger generation who have gotten used to living in a nuclear family household, or those who witnessed the drawbacks of living in a joint family, would prefer staying in Hong Kong after marriage. Sometimes the parents-in-law of the young woman do not live in Hong Kong. Even if they live in Hong Kong, the new couple can live in a nuclear family household as long as they can afford renting new flats to live separately from their parents or parents-in-law in Hong Kong. This also applies to Pakistani women who do not want to live in villages in Pakistan. Those young women who claim that they prefer an urban lifestyle usually dislike or even fear living in a joint family household.

To sum up, many Pakistani women prefer living in a nuclear family household rather than a joint family. Their views and experiences vary and are largely based on their experiences of living in Pakistan and Hong Kong and their changing status in the family. The younger generation may have different views with their parents. The middle-aged Pakistani women who migrated to Hong Kong may also change their status in the family over time and hence their views of the joint family household.

### **The Experience of Pakistani Women as an Ethnic Minority and Lower Class in Hong Kong**

The major change of lifestyles of Pakistani women in terms of the family system has been examined. In this section, I discuss how Pakistani women experience a different ways of life because they are lower class and ethnic minority in Hong Kong but middle class and overseas nationals in Pakistan.

Many Pakistani women are indeed members of the lower class in Hong Kong. They rely on their husbands as the breadwinners and are full-time housewives in



Hong Kong. The median monthly income for Pakistani men is HKD9000 (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:75). This is the lowest amount among all the ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:72, 75).<sup>27</sup>

As an ethnic minority, Pakistani women face language barriers and difficulties adapting. Typically, a Pakistani woman who cannot speak Cantonese or English encounters difficulties at a clinic, the Immigration Department, and the bank. Sabira, 36, shared how difficult it was when she was new in Hong Kong fourteen years ago. She relied heavily on her family members in Hong Kong to support her emotionally, but when they were too busy to help, she did not know where else to seek help.

When I was about to give birth to my daughter in Hong Kong, I called everybody in Pakistan. My husband and brother were too busy to help in Hong Kong. Who could I call? I asked my relatives in Pakistan, "What should I do now?" I did not know how to speak Cantonese or English. I was too shy to ask for water in the hospital. So I just waited for my husband. On those four days, I realized that I needed to do something for my life. I asked others how to use the ATM [Automatic Teller Machine], go to the bank and pay the electricity bill, send my children to school, and apply for public housing.

As an ethnic minority, Pakistani women do not know how to seek help in an unfamiliar environment when they first arrive in Hong Kong. They also face difficulties in other areas, such as education and employment opportunities, but here I will focus on the racial discrimination against Pakistani women.

Pakistani women are judged by their skin color and clothes, and are often considered as inferior to Hong Kong Chinese; hence, they experience unfair treatment, especially when they have to rent flats, choose schools for their children and use public services. Hong Kong Chinese usually call Pakistanis "A Chà" (阿差)

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<sup>27</sup> In 2006, less than 20 percent of Pakistani women worked, compared to around 70 percent of the Pakistani men (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:56, 57).

or “Chà-pòh” (差婆), which are negative and discriminatory names referring to Indians and Pakistanis. A Chà is commonly used to address males of Indian and Pakistani descent. Chà-pòh, a disrespectful epithet for the old Indian and Pakistani women, is less commonly used than A Chà. I do not know what exactly A Chà means but I would guess that A Chà comes from *acha*, the Hindi or Urdu word meaning yes. The meaning of A Chà has derogatory meaning and such cultural construction of Indians and Pakistanis in Hong Kong create boundaries between them and Hong Kong Chinese. “The cultural imagery of the Sikhs was constructed out of words such as ‘Ah Cha’ and ‘Ah Sing’ as well as canards about their local lives, including detestation of, in the everyday language descriptors used by many local Chinese to describe the Sikhs and other South Asians in Hong Kong, their ‘greedy,’ ‘lazy,’ and ‘insidious’ behaviors” (Cheuk 2008: 173).

Hong Kong Chinese often claim that Pakistanis cook curry too often and therefore smell bad. Even Pakistani children feel discrimination: a 9-year-old girl said, “They called us A Chà and did not let us play in the park. We fought back and later ran away...” A Pakistani woman, 26, who is well-educated, said, “If we have a high level of education, they won’t discriminate against us.” However, women with university degree also experience such racial discrimination or cultural exclusion. Fozia, aged 29, who had a masters degree in business, went for a job interview at a school for the post as a teaching assistant, said:

In the school, the headmaster asked me. ‘Would you continue to wear this scarf [if you teach in this school]?’... In the class, I do not wear it. The Chinese have conservative mind and they think that we are terrorists. However, everyone is different. In my previous job, my boss was a Pakistani. ‘It is up to you whether to wear Pakistani dress or not,’ he said. As the leader is a Pakistani, the Chinese colleagues would not say anything. It depends on who has the authority.

The ethnic relations between Pakistani women and their Chinese friends or



neighbors also reflect racial discrimination. Adaza often argues with the mother and son of her neighboring Chinese family regarding the tidiness of the corridor. One day, the son said, “‘Chà-pòh’ is coming!” Adaza thought, “He must have learnt this term in school.” Then, she replied, “Daaiah luhk jái” (大陸仔), which is a disrespectful term for a mainland Chinese boy.<sup>28</sup> This is a revenge on the boy because being called a mainland Chinese is disrespectful.<sup>29</sup> Also, in Ku et al’s research (2003:52), nearly half of the respondents declined to comment when they were asked whether Hong Kong people are caring (Ku et al 2003:39). However, only 22% of the respondents think that “Hong Kong people treat people of different races/nationalities equally” (Ku et al 2003:39).

Some of my informants dislike mainland Chinese and see them as of lower status than the Hong Kong Chinese. It may be because they rank different ethnic groups based on class and their experiences of British colonial rule. This is very similar to what Hong Kong Chinese have experienced in the past. In addition, Pakistanis in Hong Kong have to share the same neighborhood with new immigrants from mainland China. There are possible conflicts and misunderstanding among these two groups of immigrants. Pakistani women often hear negative comments from their husbands who work or compete for the same type of jobs in the construction industry with mainland Chinese immigrants. My informants also see that there is a fear among Hong Kong Chinese toward mainland China. They think

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<sup>28</sup> Daaiah luhk jái means “mainland boy” literally and refers to the Chinese immigrants who came to Hong Kong in late 1970s and early 1980s and later (Siu 1986:1). “Daaiah luhk” is a term referring to mainland China, which is originally a neutral word. Although Hong Kong is comprised of immigrants from mainland China since the 1940s, it is thought that most people who came in the 1970s or early 1980s were of rural origin and have used substantial government resources or push up the land price (Siu 1986:2).

<sup>29</sup> Not all Pakistani women discriminate against mainland Chinese. Some Pakistani women are more aware of promoting harmonious ethnic relations. One of them said, “I see mainland Chinese as humans.” This is probably because this informant works for the underprivileged group in the community centres, such as South Asian ethnic minorities and mainland Chinese immigrants.

that mainland China is a less economically-developed place, and people there lack educational opportunities, unlike the Hong Kong Chinese. Thus, there are both conflicts and competition between Pakistanis in Hong Kong and the new immigrants from mainland China in Hong Kong.<sup>30</sup>

In this section, I have shown that many Pakistani women are lower class and ethnic minority in Hong Kong. They face various difficulties in adapting to the new living environment in Hong Kong. They are racially discriminated against by Hong Kong Chinese. At the same time, they also discriminate against other immigrants such as the new immigrants from mainland China. However, not all Pakistani women are lower-class nor do they all experience discrimination. Those who have come to Hong Kong in recent years with a lower-class background may take some time to adapt to the new environment and cultural differences; they are the ones most likely to experience discrimination.. In the next section, I will further explore the lives of Pakistani women as middle-class and overseas nationals in Pakistan.

### **The Experience of Pakistani Women as an Ethnic Majority, Middle Class and Overseas Pakistanis in Pakistan**

Many Pakistani women feel that they are discriminated against in Hong Kong, but when they are in Pakistan, there is also discrimination – my informants discriminate against Afghanis. In Pakistan, my informants who are Punjabis are the majority of the whole country in terms of ethnicity: “Nearly half of the Pakistanis speak Punjabi while over two thirds identify it as their ethnic group.” (Weiss 2006:15). Pakistanis

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<sup>30</sup> Sabira’s husband, however, says that he is glad to see mainland Chinese growing richer than Hong Kong Chinese. He implies that the social hierarchy which has existed for years is not fair to new immigrants. He also thinks that it is good for the Hong Kong Chinese to be forced to think about whether they should discriminate against people who are different from them.



often discriminate against the refugees from Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> Adaza's 15-year-old niece said, "The refugees have different cultural practices from us. For example, they may not treasure their daughters like we do. As they are nomads, they do not shower often. Many Pakistanis think that they are dirty." It seems that Pakistani women discriminate against the Afghanis because they are poor and are the scapegoats for exhausting the social resources and reducing the job opportunities in Pakistan (Weiss 2006:158).

Hong Kong Pakistani women are not only the ethnic majority but also middle class in Pakistan. Due to the difference in living standards between Hong Kong and Pakistan, these Pakistani women have acquired two very different social statuses. The living standard in Hong Kong is much higher than that of Pakistan: the amount of monthly salaries in Hong Kong can be as much as ten times that of their counterparts in Pakistan. If Pakistanis are able to save enough money before their return, they can assume middle-class lives in Pakistan. As middle-class and overseas Pakistanis, Pakistani women from Hong Kong can invest in land and property in Pakistan (See Chapter 7).

To explain the experience of my informants as overseas Pakistanis, let me now discuss transnational gift-giving and the migration advisory roles that my informants play when they go back to Pakistan.

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<sup>31</sup> The Afghan refugees whom my informant discriminated against in Pakistan are people "who fled to Pakistan following the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan". (Weiss 2006:158). "However, the effect of over three million Afghan refugees on Pakistan has had a weighty impact on the demographics of the country... Aside from the environmental effects of populating desert areas, the social impact has been profound. The escalation of animosity between refugees and Pakistanis, particularly in the Punjab, caused the government of Pakistan to restrict the refugees' freedom of movement in the country in the mid-1980s. While Pakistan had tried to extend assistance to its neighbors at a time of need, many Pakistanis, hurt by the resultant inflation, lack of lower paying jobs that had been taken by refugees, and the proliferation of weapons especially in urban areas (which many felt had been smuggled by refugees to pay for the war effort in Afghanistan) felt their friendship had gone far enough." (Weiss 2006:158).

### **Transnational Gift-giving**

My informants are expected to give gifts to relatives in Pakistan because Pakistanis in Hong Kong are seen as richer people than their relatives who live in villages in Pakistan. When I shopped with my informants before going to Pakistan, Jannat hunted for clothes for her nieces and nephews, and handbags for sisters-in-law at a market in Hong Kong. She also bought Versace perfume, some winter clothes and a web camera for her brother and a key ring with the name of her sister-in-law on it. She also needed to bring an authentic brand-name shampoo to Pakistan because these products in Pakistan are often counterfeit. Often, these products are bought in large quantities and are in response to the needs or requests by the family back in Pakistan. Similarly, Nanna spent HKD7000 on a gold bracelet and necklace for her sister who got married in Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> She also bought clothes, toys, and electronic appliances for her relatives in Pakistan. In short, as an overseas national in Pakistan, a Pakistani woman must prepare many gifts for their relatives in Pakistan, which shows her social status and care for her relatives.

### **Migration Consultancy**

As overseas Pakistanis, Pakistani women act as experts on Hong Kong when they go back to Pakistan. They give updated information about the possibilities of migration to Hong Kong for the young male relatives. For example, Adaza is a very good consultant for the relatives who want to move to Hong Kong. During her stay in Pakistan in summer 2009, her nephew asked a few times what Hong Kong was like and what kinds of jobs his uncle, Adaza's husband, had. This young man also looked for business opportunities in Hong Kong and said, "Please give me some

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<sup>32</sup> Gold in Hong Kong is considered to be of higher quality than that in Pakistan, so some informants may buy a gold bar from a bank in Hong Kong and then ask the artisans in Pakistan to make the suitable design for the brides there.



news and ideas about what business to open in Hong Kong.” Adaza gave him friendly advice although she made it clear that it was not easy to work in Hong Kong and did not encourage him to migrate to Hong Kong.

To recap, as middle-class and overseas nationals, Pakistani women have to support their relatives materially. They also give migration advice for young relatives in Pakistan. This contrasts to their lives in Hong Kong, as members of an ethnic minority and as lower class.

## **Conclusion**

I have presented three aspects of the lives of Pakistani women in this chapter. Many Pakistani women lead rural lives in villages in Pakistan where they enjoy spacious houses with the joint family members of three to four generations. However, when they live in Hong Kong, they have to tolerate the small size of flats in Hong Kong which is a highly urbanized city. Although Pakistani women may feel unsatisfied with the cramped spaces, they enjoy a variety of social services and welfare benefits from the Hong Kong government and non-governmental organizations. They treasure these benefits because they do not have such welfare support in Pakistan.

Pakistani women cannot live with their in-laws in Hong Kong because the flats in Hong Kong are too small to accommodate so many family members. Thus, they can avoid joint family residence by living in Hong Kong and can be free from daily conflicts with their in-laws. In this way, their roles in the family may change. They can have a separate household when they go back to Pakistan, but their sisters-in-law who do not have such overseas experience cannot enjoy the same degree of independence and freedom.

Many Pakistani women feel that they are lower class and are discriminated against by Hong Kong Chinese. Nevertheless, they are psychologically compensated for this through their middle-class status and overseas image in Pakistan. Such overseas image and higher status do not come without cost. My informants are expected to send remittances to their joint family members, and build houses in their villages. They have to send gifts to Pakistan, and provide advice to aspiring migrants back home.

In these three aspects, we can see that the life experience of my informants is transformed as they live in both Pakistan and Hong Kong. Indeed, changing from joint family residence to nuclear family residence changes their roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. I will examine this issue further in Chapter 5. The experience of my informants as a lower class in Hong Kong and middle class in Pakistan affects how they shift their identities, as I will discuss in Chapter 7. However, I must note that not all Pakistani women are lower class and are discriminated against by Hong Kong Chinese. Some of them are far richer than the majority of Hong Kong Chinese. In the next chapter, I will discuss how my informants live in Hong Kong and Pakistan as Muslims.



## **Chapter 4**

### **The Lives of Pakistani Women as Muslims**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter showed the living environment, family system, and social status of Pakistani women in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. However, this is not adequate for us to understand their lives. This chapter addresses how these women adjust themselves as Muslims in Hong Kong and Pakistan. Some claim that they practice Islam and follow the Koran. However, there are times when they do not follow the Koran very closely because they have adopted certain values and ideas through the Internet and television, which deviate from the teachings of Islam. In addition, they have obligations to follow both the values of Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis in Hong Kong and Pakistan. We can thus see that Pakistani women may not practice Islam in Hong Kong in the same way they do in Pakistan.

In this chapter, I analyze how Pakistani women live as Muslims in Hong Kong with the theories of Mathews' cultural supermarket and Goffman's audience segregation. As I have discussed in the Introduction, Mathews (2000:15) notes that people may be conscious about how "they freely pick and choose the ideas they want to live by" from a cultural supermarket. Pakistani women are in a cultural supermarket where they can choose the ideas and values from the information they access. They choose these values and make them parts of their selves and hence identities. These ideas and values may be influenced by commodities, books and television programs among other sources. The amount of money one possesses both restricts and allows the freedom to choose the ideas in the cultural supermarket (Mathews 2000:20). A person who is not affluent may not have so much information

and thus fewer identities from which to choose. Despite all these choices and flexibilities, Mathews (2000:22) writes,

...the choices each of us makes as to cultural identity are made not for ourselves but for performance for and in negotiation with others: we choose ourselves within the cultural supermarket with an eye to the social world. One's cultural identity is performed in that one must convince others as to its validity: one must have the knowledge and social grace to convince others that one is not an impostor.

In other words, even though Pakistani women can choose a variety of ideas in the cultural supermarket, they still have to adjust themselves to the social world they are in and meet the expectations of their audiences in their daily interactions. This is why I bring Goffman's ideas of performances and audience segregation into the analysis of Pakistani women's lives as Muslims.

Goffman (1969:49) writes in *The Presentation of Self* that people may perform uniquely in front of different audiences: "By audience segregation the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting". Similarly, Pakistani women have to entertain different audiences in Hong Kong and Pakistan. They may show "a different side" of themselves to different audiences and hide their true human selves. That is, although they present themselves as Muslims, they are in fact not strict followers all the time, depending on the audiences, and vice versa. The theory of the cultural supermarket lets us understand the variety of choices Pakistani women have and the constraints they have. Goffman's ideas of performances allow us to understand how these women, as Muslims, may act differently in front of different audiences in their social world.

I divide this chapter into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the consumption of *halal* food, sexuality, virtual identity, and funerals and *dua* gatherings through the theory of the cultural supermarket. Pakistani women are shaped by their values or



information available on the Internet and television. They are also constrained by the wealth or social status they have in practicing their religion. That is why they usually practice Islam strictly but sometimes not. In the second part, I discuss the presentation of Pakistani women's image in front of different audiences through these examples: clothing and veiling, seclusion of women and charity. Pakistani women adjust their practices of religion depending on the audiences.

### ***Halal Food***

In this section, I discuss how Pakistani women consume food and drinks in the cultural supermarket. In this cultural supermarket, Pakistani women can choose the food in a non-*halal* restaurant rather than a *halal* restaurant that is not to their taste.<sup>33</sup> In Hong Kong, the general public lacks a thorough understanding about Islam although most people know that Muslims do not eat pork. Other than that, most do not know what *halal* is. There are limited choices for the Muslims eating out in Hong Kong.<sup>34</sup> Most Pakistani women cook at home, make lunch boxes for their husbands and children, or go out to eat in McDonald's, because the other restaurants do not suit their taste and needs<sup>35</sup>. They may eat in McDonald's, which is not a Muslim restaurant for its sense of modernity. They shun Chinese food, even though it may be

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<sup>33</sup> Pakistani women follow certain rules in terms of food and drinks as Muslims. Lewis and Churchill (2009:178) write about food in Islam. They note, "Food which is permitted is known as *halal*, a word used in much the same way as kosher among Jews...Muslims everywhere agree on three general principles: 1) No pig meat, carrion, or blood. 2) No meat of any animal, unless it has been slaughtered according to the rules laid down and with the appropriate blessing. This does not apply to fish or locusts, which may be eaten without ritual slaughter or benediction. In this, as in so many other matters, some local customs have survived into the Islamic period, and are regarded, mistakenly, as part of the holy law of Islam. These include bans on a variety of animals, birds, and other creatures. 3) No intoxicants."

<sup>34</sup> It is inconvenient for Pakistani women to dine out in Hong Kong if we compare Hong Kong to other nearby places such as Shenzhen or Singapore, where a number of restaurants are *halal* and Muslim-friendly. These restaurants entertain a large market of Chinese Muslims working in Southern China and Malay Muslims living in Singapore.

<sup>35</sup> Although not all food in McDonald's is *halal*, my informants go there for lunch and dinner because there are some choices of food that meet the standard of *halal*.

*halal*, because Chinese food does not give a sense of modernity like McDonald's. Nevertheless, Husna said, "It is easy for Pakistanis to be Muslims in Hong Kong because it depends on how strict they want to be. They can eat non-*halal* food when they go out!" She implies that Pakistani women can adjust their ways of life although they are Muslims living in Hong Kong. Throughout my interaction with these Pakistani women, I found that they may adjust their taste and consumption of food. Thus, although they may say that they must consume *halal* food, they seem to be flexible about this in practice.

Let me now explain the reasons and implications of Pakistani women's food choices. Pakistani women tend to choose "Western" *halal* food more than "Chinese" *halal* food. For example, they buy frozen sausages imported from Brazil in supermarkets, which are *halal* (See Figure 4.1). They also go to McDonald's, but not Chinese or Pakistani *halal* restaurants. Even though McDonald's is not a Muslim restaurant, it is the only restaurant in the neighborhood that they feel comfortable with because they know that the French fries and fish fillets are all fried in vegetable oil unlike the Chinese restaurants, which use lard. They urged me to confirm this with the manager of the restaurant by asking, "Do you use vegetable oil to deep-fry the food?" They become very comfortable with McDonald's, but they still feel suspicious about whether the chicken offered in KFC is *halal*.

After dining out with them a few times, I found that we always go to McDonald's but not Chinese *halal* restaurants because they did not like Chinese food. While some Chinese restaurants offer *halal* food, Pakistani women may not enjoy the Chinese-style food unless the restaurants serve mutton curry or other dishes similar to Pakistani food (See Figure 4.2). The consumption of McDonald's, which is a globalized fast food restaurant, is much more welcomed by the Pakistani women I



met. It is easy for them to locate and choose the food they like in fast-food restaurants. Therefore, Pakistani women are more comfortable and familiar with what they can get in these fast food restaurants than at Muslim Chinese restaurants. Sometimes, informants get their food in restaurants like Café De Coral or Fairwood, which are chains of fast-food restaurants offering Chinese and Western style (or localized Western) food at affordable prices. They go to these restaurants because they can ignore the fact that the fish is cooked in the same pots or pans which are also used for cooking pork. Some informants do not want to further limit their choices when dining out and continue to go to these restaurants.

However, the major reason for them to shun Chinese food but embrace Western food, including pizza and kebab, is that Western food gives them a cosmopolitan image. When they choose to eat in fast-food chain restaurants in Hong Kong, they consume a global cultural identity. As Mathews (2000:18) writes:

The very fact of consuming foreign foods – the fact that some people seek out foreign tastes, while others shun them – is itself at least an implicit statement concerning cultural identity, of belonging to a worldwide cultural supermarket, as opposed to a single culture and cuisine.

When Pakistani women shun Chinese food but embrace fast food, which symbolizes the Western world, there is a hidden national or racial hierarchy in their minds. By consuming the Western food, they also consume global or Western identities. When they shun Chinese food, they reject Chinese identity. However, when they consume McDonald's or other fusion food, they embrace the global or cosmopolitan identity and create new meanings for Muslim identity.

Here are two pictures showing the consumption of *halal* food by Pakistani women in Hong Kong.





Figure 4.1: Pakistani women shop for *halal* food in a stall in the Wan Chai wet market (Wan Chai wet market is very close to the Wan Chai mosque on Hong Kong Island). They buy frozen chicken and nuggets, ready-made *chapatti* (bread) and sauces. They also buy chicken sausages from Brazil (bottom left), which are always *halal* because Brazil targets a large *halal* market for its products. They buy frozen food for the convenience of cooking and to consume modernity.



Figure 4.2: Pakistani women sometimes go to *halal* food stalls in the Wan Chai market. They go for lunch in these food stalls before or after their shopping for raw *halal* meat in the market nearby. This picture shows the sign for *halal* in Arabic and Chinese. Some informants go there for their mutton curry, which they say tastes very good and is like Pakistani food. The fusion of Cantonese roasted duck and chicken as well as the mutton curry in this stall reflects transnational consumption of *halal* food in Hong Kong.

## Sexuality

Pakistani women in Hong Kong can select different ways of life as Muslims with the Internet content they access and television programs they watch. During a home visit with some Pakistani women, I encountered a very surprising conversation; they talked about the size of their husbands' penises, using their arms and hands to show



the length. One of my informants told me that she did not have chance to chit-chat about sex when she was in Pakistan because she was not free to meet any friends there. Moreover, it was not common to hang out with friends in Pakistan at that time. She explained,

You know, I subscribe to the Playboy Channel...I am married so I can watch it. My religion does not allow me to do this. But I only watch. I don't do it practically....There would be little privacy if I lived in Pakistan. The neighbors come by....But Hong Kong Pakistanis go out and sleep with Indonesians and Filipinos. See, non-Muslims and Muslims are the same.

In the same gathering, one unmarried woman whom I do not know very well said, "I went to see my future through my palm, it is said that my first husband will be Chinese, then I will have a Black husband!" One of the reasons why my informants tend to talk about these sensitive issues freely is that some feel that Hong Kong is a "free" city. One saying I heard from my informants can explain their feelings about living in Hong Kong as Muslims: "Allah is not in Hong Kong; Allah is in Pakistan." We can thus see that in the daily lives of my informants, there are many things that they do which contradict their Islamic teachings. Their Muslim identities appear to be more fluid and flexible than it seems. From the point of view of a Hong Kong Chinese, who do not know much about Pakistani women, it may seem that Pakistani women are controlled and have no freedom to do what they want. However, when these women gather with their close friends, they talk about their sex lives and sexual partners – they may even be much more open than Hong Kong Chinese. This may be because the segregation of women and men allows women to be worry-free in talking about sex. Their access to cable television, as well as freedom to meet their close friends, also allows Pakistani women chances to talk about sexual issues. Sometimes they seem to be defenders of Islam, but not in other situations. Their choices depend on the information they can access and the audiences they deal with.

## Virtual Identity

Some Pakistani women choose the ideas and identities they want to live with via the Internet. They may have a different image and behavior online. This virtual world allows some Pakistani women who are housewives or busy working mothers to relax online and assume a different identity, as “single and young” women who are still in the university – I suspect this kind of identity is ideal for some of my informants. This also allows my informants to have access to assorted information online and happenings around the world.

When my informants talk to strangers online through the “Pakistan chat room” on Yahoo! Messenger, one of them claims that she is 22 years old although she is actually 29. Another regularly chats online with Pakistani strangers using a fake identity as a single young woman who has Chinese blood. Some informants claim to be from Lahore or Islamabad, to hide their rural origins. Some of them allow the friends they know online to remotely access their computer and fix problems. Indeed, I find this surprising because most Hong Kong Chinese may not easily let people have access to their computer for fear of losing confidential information.

Although my informants may use fake identities online, there are many benefits for them to go online, where they can gain more knowledge and strengthen their networks with their family members overseas. Bapsi has a brother in the United Kingdom and was not able to share her life in Hong Kong except when they are on the phone. After Bapsi learnt how to use the internet, she was able to send him pictures of her daughters through email. She could use the internet to build her networks with other overseas Pakistanis, or Pakistanis in cities such as Lahore or Islamabad. It raises her social status from her rural background to urban dweller. It also gives her more exposure to current events in cities in Pakistan, or places in the



United Kingdom or even Saudi Arabia.

Pakistani women choose their identities as free and cosmopolitan women on the internet. With the websites and chat rooms they access, they select a different hometown, ethnicity and age for themselves; hence, their own identities online. As Mathews (2000:21) writes, “We fashion ourselves from the cultural supermarket in a number of areas, among them our choices in home décor, in food and clothing, in what we read, watch, and listen to in music, art, and popular culture, in our religious belief, and in ethnic and national identity itself.”

Similarly, by watching certain television programs and getting information from the Internet, Pakistani women are able to consume a variety of cultural identities available in the cultural supermarket. Although they are Muslims, they may identify themselves as Muslims in the physical world, but in a virtual world they are secular.

### **Funerals and *Dua* gatherings**

While some Pakistani women who migrated to Hong Kong seem to have various choices in the cultural supermarket, they are restricted in some aspects because of their limited wealth. They change some Islamic practices such as funerals and *dua* gatherings (prayer gatherings before and after funerals).<sup>36</sup> It is expensive to bury the deceased and there is not enough space for large-scale *dua* gathering in Hong Kong. In addition, Pakistanis prefer the burial to take place in Pakistan so that more people can see the deceased's last face. As a result, very few Pakistanis are buried in Hong Kong. According to Mr. Ali Jauhar, the Manager of Muslim Cemeteries in Hong

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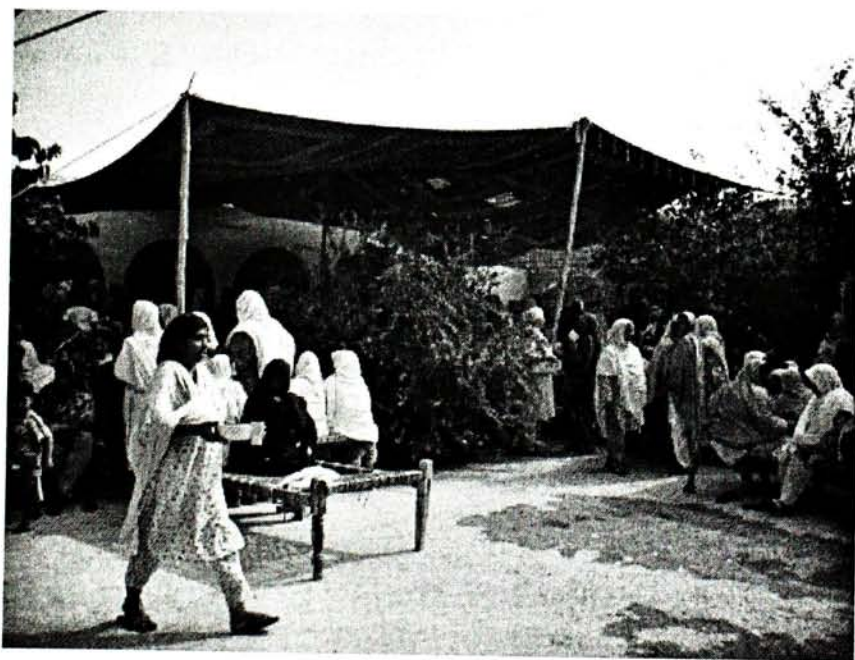
<sup>36</sup> *Dua* “denotes a personal prayer or invocation addressed by the believer to God” (Lewis and Churchill 2009:15). In this chapter, it refers to the prayer gatherings in which Pakistani women meet and pray for the deceased during and after the funerals.

Kong, the cost of an Islamic burial in Hong Kong is not too high when compared to the Christian or Catholic cemeteries, which may cost over HKD100,000. However, it is around HKD35,000 to HKD40,000 for a burial in Happy Valley and Chai Wan cemeteries for Muslims. Still, it is much cheaper to bury their loved ones in Pakistan.

Mr. Jauhar said,

Pakistanis prefer to send the deceased to Pakistan for burial than bury the deceased in Hong Kong, although in Islam a person should be buried where he/she passed away. There are 95% of deceased Pakistanis from Hong Kong buried in Pakistan. It may be because of the tradition. They want their families to see the last face, so they send the deceased to Pakistan. It is also cheaper to do it in Pakistan, which costs around HKD20,000. The relatives of the deceased give us HKD1000 for the management fee of Muslim cemetery while the services from funeral companies and one air ticket cost HKD19,000. They contact us for the washing service if they want to do it in Hong Kong. If they don't want to wash the *mayat* (the deceased body) here, then they don't contact us. They contact the Chinese funeral company and they will take care of the whole process including sending the body back to Pakistan.

From this description, we can understand that most Pakistani women I interviewed do not hold funerals in Hong Kong because of the constraints of space in Hong Kong, the limited wealth of Pakistani women in Hong Kong, and the need to oblige relatives in Pakistan.<sup>37</sup>



<sup>37</sup> There are some committees which Pakistani women may join and share the cost of funerals for the members of the committee. Each time a member passes away, all other members have to pay around HKD150 to HKD200 to split the cost of the air tickets.



Figure 4.3: Female relatives gather at the house of the deceased Pakistani woman for the *dua* in a village near Wah Cantt. In Hong Kong, there is little space for Pakistani women to hold such funeral and *dua* gatherings at their flats.

Even though most Pakistani women I interviewed can bury their loved ones in Hong Kong in an Islamic way, they may not do so because it is too expensive; they prefer to bury their relatives in Pakistan. In Pakistan, they can hold the funerals in a more elaborate way with the space available and a large number of guests (see Figure 4.3). At the funerals, Pakistani women have to follow the village customs and the gender roles in Pakistan, because they have to entertain both relatives in Pakistan and friends in Hong Kong.

Village customs clearly define women and men's roles in the funerals and *dua* gatherings. Women are not allowed to get close to the graveyard, so when I was in Pakistan, I was only allowed to watch the digging process from the rooftop of the house. My informants said that Pakistani women cannot go to see the *kaplastan* (graves) for fear of the spirits in the graveyard, which can "see through the women's clothes", as Sabira explained. "Everybody has to see the dead body, then they pray for the dead and bury it afterwards but only men can be present when burying the body," Mina said. Nonetheless, Jauhar said that women can also go to the graves, for instance, Pakistani women and men can visit graves together in Hong Kong. He said, "In villages, women may not be allowed to go to the graves. In town, women can go there too," indicating that the practice in town is not so gender-specific. However, the practices of villages can extend to Hong Kong. As most Pakistanis in Hong Kong are from the villages in Pakistan, they would follow the "village rules" when they attend funerals in Pakistan. Even though they have already gained a "cosmopolitan" image as Pakistanis from Hong Kong, they are still not allowed to see the burial in Pakistan. This shows the limited choice of Pakistani women. On one hand, they lead their transnational lives as urban dwellers from Hong Kong, but on the other hand they

follow village practices in Pakistan. We can also see that the audiences in funerals in Pakistan are different from those in Hong Kong. Pakistani women may also act differently if they participate in funerals or prayer gatherings in Pakistan.

Thus, we can see that there are restrictions in one's choice of ideas and values in the cultural supermarket. As Mathews (2000:21) writes:

One who is educated and affluent may possess optimal receiving equipment: access to and ability to make use of the repository of human thought contained in libraries, and access to the contemporary repositories of thought in the Internet and in mass media – the world assortment of newspapers, magazines....A person with such advantages may make full use of the cultural supermarket, but many of the people in the world cannot – their access to the cultural supermarket is more limited, confined to whatever echoes of the cultural supermarket may reach their particular corner of the world. No doubt more people from rich societies than poor societies, and more people from the upper affluent, educated classes in every society than the lower, poorer, less educated classes have this optimal receiving equipment.

Most Pakistani women I interviewed are poor in Hong Kong, and this restricts their choices of holding funerals in Hong Kong. Thus, we can see that although there are a variety of choices for Pakistani women in the cultural supermarket, there are also constraints facing them in choosing these identities. They have to follow village customs and gender roles played in the funerals in Pakistan. In the following, I will examine how some of my informants have to deal with the constraints in the social world they live in using Goffman's theory of performance management.

## **Clothing and Veiling**

In this section, I discuss how most of the Pakistani women I interviewed wear veils in front of Pakistani men and they may not do so if they are in front of Hong Kong Chinese. These women act according to the audiences they are in front of and their performances are conditioned by their audiences' expectations.



In order to understand why Pakistani women act more religiously in front of Pakistani men and other community members but not Hong Kong Chinese, we have to understand the concept of *purdah* in the Pakistani and Islamic cultural context. *Purdah* is a key concept affecting the physical mobility, gender relations, clothes and opportunities to work of Pakistani women. As Pananek (1971:518) writes, "*purdah*, meaning curtain, is a word most commonly used to describe the system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty in South Asia, particularly Pakistan and India." Women should be separated from unrelated men by restricting their physical mobility and ways of dress.

Weiss (2006:163) writes that the practice of *purdah* in Pakistan depends on family traditions, class and rural or urban residence. "(F)amily traditions have more to do with whether or not women observe *purdah* and, if they do, the kind of veil they might wear...." (Weiss 2006:162, 3). For the *izzat* (honor) of the family, Pakistani women should cover their hair and sometimes face to protect themselves from the gaze of men. However, there is no such concept in the Hong Kong cultural context. Consequently, Pakistani women may have to be more careful to dress and veil properly in front of Pakistanis than Hong Kong Chinese. They would immediately check if they are well-covered when they are in the areas where many Pakistanis gather. If they have a choice, they avoid going to restaurants opened by Pakistanis. Instead, they go to Muslim restaurants opened by Egyptians or other non-Pakistani Muslims in Hong Kong.

Let me explain how Pakistani women deal with Pakistani parents or elders' expectation of clothing. Western clothes are usually not approved among the Pakistani community in Hong Kong, especially by those from the older generations. Conservative or religious Pakistanis may think that when a Pakistani woman wears

Western clothes, and puts away her scarf and does not cover her hair and face, this is immodest behavior. They assume that Western clothes are usually tight and show the bodily shape of a woman. Western clothes are thus usually forbidden by Pakistani parents for their daughters. Pakistani women have to negotiate what they wear with their elders or those who are conservative in Pakistan. In Pakistan and Hong Kong, most parents allow their young children to wear Western clothes, but Pakistani teenage girls who grow up in Hong Kong may continue to wear Western clothes even when they enter their teenage years. For most teenage girls who travel back and forth between Hong Kong and Pakistan, they have to adapt to the religious views of their Pakistani relatives in Pakistan, even though they are allowed to dress in a Western way in Hong Kong. Adaza, 39, of the caste named, Khan Pathan, was born in Hong Kong and wore Western clothes until she moved back to Pakistan when she was eleven. Today, she puts on her *abbaya* whenever she goes out in Hong Kong. She said,

When I was small, I did not have to wear Pakistani clothes. I could wear skirts and have my hair like yours. When I moved back to Pakistan, my uncle said, 'She is eleven now. She has to wear *dupata* [scarf].' I was very tall when compared to the other girls. I didn't even know how to wrap myself....Now I have gotten used to it. There will be a final judgment on me after I die if I do not veil.

In front of their parents, most Pakistani women choose to wear Pakistani clothes. For example, Jamila who married an Australian Pakistani, chooses to wear Western clothes to fit the living environment of Hong Kong and Australia. However, she said,

I would prefer *shalwar kameez* if my father was in Hong Kong. Pakistani and Muslim women are ordered to cover the shape of their bodies. This is an order in Islam. Jeans make my body shape visible because they are usually tight. Pakistani women are ordered to wear loose dresses or long skirts, which do not show your body shape. My mother-in-law is okay with me wearing Western clothes. She knows that I wear jeans. She has lived in Australia for so many years. She knows that how it would be like if I wear *shalwar kameez*



there: I might be discriminated against if I wore Pakistani clothes.

My informants quoted above are careful in dress in both Hong Kong and Pakistan because *purdah* is accompanied by gossip or comments across borders. "My father does not allow me to go out in Western dress. What would his friends think about me if I did that? They can gossip about it from Hong Kong to Pakistan as they know our relatives and family friends in Pakistan. My father warns me of this and that to protect his face." said Asba, 26. She wore Western dress in secret when she traveled overseas, but showed the pictures to her brothers only. If she does so in Hong Kong, she feels that she is being watched by Pakistani men constantly.

In front of unrelated Pakistani men, Pakistani women veil to show their Muslim image. They may dress in *abbaya* (a long dress covering the whole body, usually in black color) to show their modesty. For instance, Jannat does not want Muslim men to look at her with disrespectful eyes, especially around areas where Pakistanis gather such as mosques. She wears *abbaya* when she has to go near these places in Hong Kong. Most informants do not wear Western clothes, except those who need to work or have their husbands' permission. Their main audiences are their parents or husbands, as well as the members in the Pakistani community.

The above analysis has emphasized how Pakistani women feel pressure to dress in *shalwar kameez* and veil; but some Pakistani women I spoke with said that they are discriminated against by Hong Kong Chinese if they wear *shalwar kameez* and veil. Dress is a form of cultural exclusion in Hong Kong and markers of social boundaries (Ku 2006:291). Hong Kong Chinese pay a great deal of attention to dress and often judge people according to their dress. Pakistani women do not put on *niqab* (a veil that covers the face) in Hong Kong because they know that Hong Kong Chinese would be curious and stare at them if they do so. Some women cover their

faces in Pakistan but not in Hong Kong. Adaza said,

In Hong Kong, not many Pakistanis do the *niqab*; so many non-Muslims find us weird if we veil our faces. We do not want the Chinese men to stare at us, and so we just cover our hair with the *dupata*. The Chinese do not understand our culture and religion. In Pakistan, if you do not cover your face, the men stare at you and think that you are not a modest woman, so we have to cover our face in Pakistan.

We can thus see that these Pakistani women try to achieve one aim: they want to reduce the attention of men to their faces and bodies, no matter where they are. Therefore, most Pakistani women veil their hair only, or sometimes just drape the *dupata* over their breasts in Hong Kong, but cover their face and body carefully when they go back to Pakistan. Some young and educated Pakistani women who work change to Western clothes which are loose and do not show their body shape. They understand very well that their Pakistani clothes are not welcomed by Hong Kong Chinese employers. They change the way they dress with the permission of their husbands or fathers.

Pakistani women are thus expected to be modest and wear Pakistani clothes by their relatives in both Hong Kong and Pakistan, but they are challenged and culturally excluded in Hong Kong when they wear *shalwar kameez*. Such discrimination against Pakistani women who wear *shalwar kameez* remains unresolved, because even if they change their clothes, they still face discrimination.<sup>38</sup> They change their dress in order to fit themselves into various situations and entertain different audiences (see Chapter 7). They veil to protect their face as Muslims, and some change their clothes to claim their image as Hongkongese. We can see that Pakistani women face double pressure from their Pakistani relatives in

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<sup>38</sup> The issue of dress and cultural exclusion in Hong Kong is also related to the socio-economic status of Pakistani women. The lack of understanding of Pakistani women and their culture by the majority Hong Kong Chinese makes clothing an issue for Pakistani women in Hong Kong. Ku (2006:285) points out that the skin color of a person and racial hierarchies are the reasons for such racial discrimination against Pakistanis or Indians.



Hong Kong and from Hong Kong Chinese.



Figure 4.4: In this picture, taken on a Hong Kong street, a Pakistani woman is wearing simple *shalwar kameez* that she may wear at home. She uses her *dupata* to cover her hair and chest, which implies that she is a religious and modest woman. Pakistani women's clothes are markers which make them culturally excluded.



Figure 4.5: In Hong Kong, some women use their scarf to drape over their breasts and faces but some women do not. This picture was taken at the Happy Mammy Ambassador Anti-child Neglect Award Presentation/Mini Fun Fair in Hong Kong. Most Pakistani women who participate in this function dress up as they usually do at all important functions. *Shalwar kameez* can also make them look cosmopolitan – we can see this in the young Pakistani women in Hong Kong.

## Seclusion of Women

In this section, I discuss how Pakistani women may practice *purdah* in Hong Kong because of the differences of audiences and social worlds they are in. As in the previous section on clothes and veiling, Pakistani women are segregated from men and should stay at home for the honor of the family. However, they may have flexibility in going outside home in Hong Kong, because of the liberal views of their husbands. In the following, I discuss several reasons for the higher physical mobility

of these women.

The audiences of Pakistani women change when they live in Hong Kong. There are no longer in-laws who control their physical mobility in Hong Kong. Jannat said, "We can go outside home because we are not living in a joint family system in Hong Kong." As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Pakistani women live in a nuclear family household in Hong Kong and are mostly free to meet their female friends as long as they are trusted by their parents or husbands. This is because they are no longer under the strict control of their mothers-in-law, who are usually not in Hong Kong. Although some Pakistani women are restricted in terms of the areas they go to (such as within the neighborhood), most of them have higher physical mobility in Hong Kong.

Pakistani women usually have to deal with their husbands in Hong Kong in terms of the freedom of leaving home. Thus, they have higher physical mobility in Hong Kong than in Pakistan. Bapsi said,

In Hong Kong, I can go out in the afternoon or in the evening but in Pakistan, I can never go out in the evening. In Hong Kong, my husband knows that I go out for shopping in market, taking the children to the hospital [two of her children have long-term illnesses], and go to the park for exercises. My husband trusts me and thinks that it is okay that I go outside.

The change of audiences is only one of the factors for Pakistani women going outside home. They go outside home based on the needs of daily life. They go to the market in Hong Kong, because their husbands have to work for long hours and do not have time to handle grocery shopping. In Pakistan, they do not need to do the shopping because their husbands do it for them after work. They assume this role in Hong Kong and therefore have legitimate reasons for going outside their home.

Let me now examine how Pakistani women deal with Chinese neighbors and Pakistani neighbors. Pakistani women are not worried about the comments of Hong



Kong Chinese. This is because Pakistani women tend to trust Hong Kong Chinese as decent and well-behaved people in terms of the respect toward women's bodies. As a young and unmarried woman, Asba did not feel safe to live in Pakistan. She said,

Compared to Pakistan, it's paradise in Hong Kong. I feel secure. I didn't go out alone and I was scared of people and the environment in Pakistan because I was quite young. [Why were you insecure in Pakistan?] Guys make comments to you. 'Do you feel good?' You can't call police in Pakistan because the police are not helpful at all. I felt insecure as unmarried girls are not protected. When I was 16 years old, my mother went out with me in Pakistan. I did not go outside much. You have to have somebody accompanying you. If you move around, it is bad for the reputation of the family. The men may stare at you and make you insecure. As a teenager, for months and in summer vacation, I did not go outside. But if I am in Hong Kong, it's okay to do that.

Asba implies that seclusion of women at home is not heavily practiced among Pakistani women in Hong Kong although it is generally agreed that women should not go out without being accompanied by a *mahram* (a male blood-relative such as grandfather or father). Safety brings more freedom to teenage girls in Hong Kong, because their parents would be less worried about their safety when they go to school and from school.

Pakistani women have to be careful if they go outside home without the permission of their husbands for fear that their Pakistani neighbors may gossip about this. Their neighbors or friends of their husbands may talk behind their backs in the community. Such gossip influences the seclusion of women, similar to the way it has affected the dress of Pakistani women in Hong Kong. However, the informal control on the seclusion of women seems to be less significant than it is on dress. This is because Pakistani women have legitimate reasons to go out in Hong Kong, as they do not have in-laws' help in their daily lives. It is also because Pakistani women mainly have to obey their husbands, rather than other Pakistanis.

Due to the differences in audiences, most Pakistani women embrace

flexibility in going outside the home in Hong Kong and have to adjust themselves when they go to Pakistan. Living in Hong Kong, they seem to have more opportunities to leave their homes and not practice seclusion strictly. Their audiences in Hong Kong (such as Hong Kong Chinese) do not care much about whether Pakistani women are secluded. While Pakistani women go outside home often, it does not mean that they are not modest or religious women. They lead different lives in Hong Kong in order to adapt to the changes of audience and environment. However, there are exceptions. Some of my informants may continue their practices of seclusion in Hong Kong, because they are very much restricted by their family in terms of physical mobility. My informants of Pathan caste are the strictest among all Pakistani women in terms of seclusion of women and veiling. They carefully follow the concept of *purdah*, because their husbands may request them to stay home most of the time, as if they were in Pakistan. They claim that they have the tradition of having the strict observation of *purdah*. They also use this to keep their religious image in the community and stand out as Pathans.

## Charity

Charity is one of the main concepts of Islam and is obligatory to all Muslims.<sup>39</sup> Pakistani women may be more charitable in front of some audiences in Pakistan, but are less generous when they are in Hong Kong. When they go back to Pakistan, they act more generously because they feel obliged to help other Pakistanis in need. Their relatives may think that they are middle class and can afford to offer tips or financial assistance to others in Pakistan. After having a meal in a restaurant, Adaza tipped the waiter 100 Pakistani rupees. She said, "It is just ten Hong Kong

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<sup>39</sup> Charity is "the third pillar" in Islam. It is practiced by giving tax or donations to the community (Lewis and Churchill 2009:16).



dollars. This young man has a tough life. And he is very polite, so he deserves it.” Jannat also gave money to the beggars in Pakistan when she went out in a nice car. She gave the money to the beggars without hesitation. However, I have never seen Jannat giving money to any beggars in Hong Kong nor Adaza tipping a waitress/waiter in Hong Kong. When they are in Hong Kong, they think that they are “the lowest lower class” and are financially incapable in helping the underprivileged. They are therefore not very generous to beggars in Hong Kong.

Although it seems that my informants do not have the financial capability to assist other people in need in Hong Kong, they may help their Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistani friends or neighbors in non-monetary ways in Hong Kong. One day, I was accompanying my informants to go home from the supermarket, my informants saw an old woman walking toward the supermarket. She passed the stamps she collected at the supermarket to the Hong Kong Chinese old woman. These stamps were for buying kitchenware at a discounted price in the supermarket. This informant who showed her generosity to a random Hong Kong Chinese woman said, “This old granny needs these stamps which I do not need. So why don’t I give her a helping hand?” We should not assume that all Pakistani women are reluctant to offer a helping hand even if they are poor. On the contrary, at times, they seem generous toward people in need.

Indeed, my informants also benefit from other charitable Pakistanis. My informants, especially the poorer ones, rely on the financial aid from their friends or relatives to survive in Hong Kong. One divorced woman gets HKD1000 from a rather rich Pakistani man in Hong Kong because the welfare benefits (around HKD2500) she receives from the government are not enough for her and her children to live on in Hong Kong. This extra HKD1000 was essential for her living in Hong

Kong.

We can thus see that it depends on who the audiences are when Pakistani women donate, tip or give a helping hand to others. The living environment and the ability of Pakistani women also affect how they act as Muslims who have to be charitable. Pakistani women are also beneficiaries in terms of charity because some of them are financially strained in Hong Kong.

## **Conclusion**

As Clifford (1997:259) mentions, "Women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a 'home' culture and a tradition—selectively." Using the ideas of both Mathews (2000) and Goffman (1959), this chapter has shown how Pakistani women selectively practice their Islamic ways of life. These women may choose in a conditional way to perform their identities within their social worlds in front of different audiences. On the one hand, they select the ideas and values in the cultural supermarket and adopt these ideas as part of their identities. Through the television or the Internet, they gain access to ideas or values, which may be contradictory to their Muslim identities. Nonetheless, they may adopt these ideas and hence make them part of their identities. We have seen how these women may use a fake identity on the Internet. For instance, they may act in a non-Muslim manner and watch pornography. They may consume a cosmopolitan way of life by having fast food at McDonald's. On the other hand, their lives as Muslims largely depend on their audiences and the social world they are in. Their audiences are usually their family members, relatives in both Hong Kong and Pakistan, and, last but not least, the Hong Kong Chinese who may discriminate against them. These audiences restrict the choices of Pakistani women to live as Muslims. For example, they may practice



*pardah* and try to meet the expectation of Pakistani relatives but Hong Kong Chinese culturally exclude Pakistani women in the form of dress. Thus, we can see that they face a dilemma in being Muslims and practicing *pardah* in Hong Kong. They can choose their Muslim identities in a conditional way. In the next chapter, I will further explore the lives of Pakistani women as marriage partners and mothers.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Lives of Pakistani Women as Marriage Partners and Mothers**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines how Pakistani women live as marriage partners and mothers in Hong Kong and in Pakistan. The Pakistani women I interviewed shared different life stories, which inevitably touched upon their problems as women, including their roles as wives and mothers. Before discussing the common problems they face, the concept of gender relations, marriage and family in the Pakistani cultural context should be examined first.

According to Weiss (2006:160),

(t)wo perceptions characterize the basic understanding of gender relations in Pakistani context: Women are subordinate to men, and men's honor resides in the actions of the women of his family.... Marriage serves as a means of cementing alliances between two extended families. [Marriage makes Pakistanis] participate fully in social life, a person must be married and have children, preferably (a) son.

Therefore, the primary role or even goal of life for a typical Pakistani woman is to be a good wife, mother and eventually a mother-in-law. Such roles may extend across borders, if they are not transformed. For instance, Pakistani women in Hong Kong may experience transnational marriage and family relations, and deal with various issues related to marriage and family.

Here, I group the major issues related to marriage and family into the following categories: 1) transnational marriage arrangement, 2) early marriage and lack of education, 3) split households, 4) extra-marital affairs and divorce, and 5) conflicts with in-laws.



## Transnational Marriage Arrangement

Arranged marriage is regarded as “a risky process...with the dangers that potential spouses' flaws may be concealed, proposals may be rejected, or daughters mistreated” (Charsley 2009: 130). When arranged marriage takes place between Hong Kong and Pakistan, the risk is even higher because extended family members cannot offer immediate assistance during times of marital conflicts or maltreatment of spouses. There are two common cases of transnational marriage: on the one hand, Pakistani women have permanent residency in Hong Kong marrying Pakistani men who are still in Pakistan; on the other hand, the Pakistani women as bride migrants marry permanent Hong Kong residents of Pakistani descendants. Transnational marriage challenges both Pakistani women and men.<sup>40</sup>

However, although arranged marriage seems inappropriate for outsiders and Westerners, it is very well-accepted by Pakistanis, as it is generally agreed to be a wise decision by their parents in Pakistan. “Parents and their siblings become actively involved in arranging marriages for their children. The assumption is that elders are more worldly and experienced, and that they know the temperament of their own child very well, hence are in a better position to decide a good match than their child.” (Weiss 2006:161). According to Shaw (2001:325), “(t)he choices that are made have a far-reaching impact upon the parents, their siblings, their siblings' children, and a range of other relatives, affecting the futures and socio-economic positions of a much wider range of kin than just parents and children.” The decisions behind arranged marriages are therefore corporate ones rather than individual ones (Shaw 2001:325).

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<sup>40</sup> There are marriages held where both husband and wife are already in Hong Kong among the Pakistanis. However, many of my informants do not have large number of relatives in Hong Kong, which makes it hard for them to find their husbands or wives within the same family in Hong Kong.

My informants may not think that arranged and early marriage is necessarily a bad thing because after marriage they enter a new stage in life and attain a different social status. For example, Fatima, who will get married after she turns 18, waits for her marriage happily in Hong Kong and is ready to become the head of the beauty salon at her husband's house after the wedding in Pakistan. "I will have the biggest share of the salon because my husband is the eldest son and I will run the beauty salon." This also reflects how getting married does not mean suffering, but an opportunity to make money, which she did not have before. Fatima looks forward to going back to settle in Pakistan.

Still, some of my informants found that arranged marriage is risky. Let me discuss the first common type of case: Pakistani women who hold permanent residency in Hong Kong are expected to marry their kin in villages in Pakistan. The men who migrated to Hong Kong through such marriages are often seen as the beneficiary of this because they may prosper by migrating to Hong Kong through marriage. Such demands from the kin in the village never cease. This makes my informants, especially the very well-educated ones, upset. Recently, Asba who holds a master degree and has worked as a teacher in Hong Kong has gone back to Pakistan and gotten a marriage proposal. The proposal is from her *popo*, father's sister, who asked Asba to marry her son. This young man is four years younger than Asba and has a metric level in education (equal to form three or four level in Hong Kong, which means he has only received nine years of education). However, Asba has longed for a husband who would earn more money than she does, who is well-educated, and has a sense of respect for women. Given that the proposal fell short of her expectations, she felt upset and annoyed. She said,

They never consider your feelings. They think that if their son marries me, he would go to Hong Kong, earn a lot of money and send the money back to



them. Their lives would be improved....They don't think that we would not match each other on the mental level. I called my sister and complained. I will never come back to this village again....<sup>41</sup>

The rejection to the proposal has caused some problems between Asba's parents and her aunt. Asba said, "They also blamed my mother for not letting my brother marry their daughter. [Her brother married outside the family through an agent.] They said that my mother controlled everything..." Ballard (2009:29) has written about the marriage of Muslim Pakistanis in Britain and Pakistan; this can explain the pressure on Asba and her parents, as well as the views of her *popo*. He noted,

Muslim migrants are members of much more closely-knit kinship networks, within which they usually find themselves under intense pressure to accept offers of marriage on behalf of their siblings' children back in Pakistan. And they also know that if they refuse, they are likely to be charged with having become so anglicized that they have forgotten their most fundamental duties towards their kin. These pressures are extremely hard to resist.

However, Asba is a very lucky young woman because her parents did not marry her to a cousin when she was 15 or 16. Asba's father values education and financial independence for his daughter and therefore Asba can still reject the proposal and wait for a better one. Most Pakistani women are not so fortunate because they married young and lack education. In the following section, I will show they often experience problems because they marry early.

### **Early Marriage and Lack of Education**

In addition to the risks of transnational marriage, most Pakistani women get married very young and lack education. Some Pakistani women were married off quickly once they reached puberty under the arrangement of their parents. These Pakistani

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<sup>41</sup> Asba and her family members moved to Rawalpindi when she was two years old. She spent many holidays in the village with her cousins when she was small. Thus, she may only go back to her home in Rawalpindi but not her hometown in the village in the future.

women might not be psychologically prepared for marriage. In Islam, after menstruation starts, parents can marry off their daughters. This is "a contract agreed between the bridegroom and the legal guardian of the bride" (Lewis and Churchill 2009:113). Therefore, it is legitimate for the parents of my informants to arrange marriages for their teenage daughters.

Some informants became engaged when they were around 12 to 15 years old and got married a few years after engagement, around age 16. As they married young and had to take care of their children, they did not have many opportunities for further education. Some regret marrying too early and asked me not to do so. Bapsi got married when she was 16 and now has four daughters. She felt that she has lost her freedom because taking care of the children and housework makes her very busy.

The problems faced by the women who are not educated and married are much more complicated than those faced by educated and married women. They may have a hard time in adapting to their new lives; for example, Noshaba, 26, came to Hong Kong to settle down when she was 15 years old. Having few educational opportunities and alternatives in life, she was not aware of the problems of getting married too early. She shared this with me in simple Cantonese, which she learnt after she moved to Hong Kong,

I got married when I was 16. I didn't feel scared. Now I know that it was too early and dangerous for me. I didn't study much. I studied until I was primary one or two....After I got married, I and my husband just slept together for half a year. We were so young. We were only 16. We didn't know sex. My friend asked, 'Did you...with your husband?' Haha. Then I know.

Early marriage deprives these young women of the ability to improve their lives after marriage because they have very few educational opportunities. They may not know English and have little ability to adapt to life in Hong Kong. A few Pakistani women may have metric level education in Pakistan. A number of Pakistani



women in Hong Kong, like Noshaba, studied until they were in primary two, thus obtaining only two years of education. There are 30% of Pakistanis in Hong Kong whose highest education level attained is primary school level, and it is even lower for women (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong 2007b:46). For some Pakistani women, marriage disrupts their education; of those who marry and quit school, only a few go on to university. After marriage, these women have to stay at home to take care of their children and the elderly. Many of these women lived in Pakistan in the first few years of marriage, and only went to Hong Kong after they have given birth. They have little choice about when to come to Hong Kong if they do not have the permission and financial support of their husbands. If they were fortunate enough to migrate to Hong Kong, they would have a hard time adapting to an unfamiliar environment. Thus, early marriage which disrupts education hinders Pakistani women in their efforts to adapt to the environment in Hong Kong.

Marufa, 19, the niece of my informant, is a beautiful woman who married young in Pakistan. She seems to be an upper-middle class young woman because her husband is a colonel in the military. Although Marufa was not a transnational Hong Kong Pakistani woman, her story is a typical one, which is experienced by many transnational Pakistani women who face the pressure of getting married early (young Pakistani women like Asba face pressures from marriage proposals in a similar vain and feel very stressed and upset like Marufa). Therefore, her story is worth examining. Marufa recalled her marriage planned by her parents:

I cannot believe that I am going to be a mother as I am still a young girl. My in-laws say that the baby came so late. They said that I should conceive a baby right after my marriage. Well, it was Allah's will when I have to conceive. Now everyone is happy but I am very unhappy for my studies. Obviously I cannot join any institute in this condition. I have always planned for my studies and future since my childhood but not even one single dream comes true. I am really a disappointed girl.

I was always good at school and thought that I would become a doctor in



the future. I never thought that I would get married so early but when I was 14 years old, my cousin got divorced. Then his family proposed the marriage. I was very depressed but I did not say anything. I just left the decision to my parents and I did whatever they said because I did not want to give them pain and tension by refusing....I hid all my feelings in my heart and never told them. In our society good girls don't say anything in front of their parents about their marriage and their husbands.

Well...then my parents accepted their proposal and engaged me. I was very much disturbed from this. I used to weep at night hiding myself in the blanket. I thought, "I will marry a person whom I do not like: He is 15 years older than me and divorced..." Then I chose pre-medical subjects. I started studying hard again...then my in-laws came and again asked about the marriage. My parents asked me about this and what I wanted. I just said, "Please do not get me married so soon." Well...They made the *nikkah* [engagement]...I was considered a married girl then.

Again I was very much disappointed. Then when I was 17 years old, my in-laws asked about marrying me to their son again. I was not happy then because I was getting married so early. Not a single friend of mine was engaged and I was getting married. I asked for a promise from my husband that he would let me study even after marriage and he promised.

Well, then I got married and my result of FSc premedical studies came after two months of my marriage.<sup>42</sup> I begged my husband many times to let me study further but he did not fulfill his promise until now. Seven months have passed after my wedding but he did not allow me to study.

And now, it is not possible for me to go out and study. I have become a really disappointed girl that none of my dream comes true. I do not know why God did this to me. I prayed and asked god to help me study again. But still there is a very little hope that I will continue my studies after one year. After giving birth to my baby...

Marufa's experience is indeed very painful for her. This story is repeated in the lives of many women who make use of religion for comfort. Marufa explained,

There are many girls who are in worse condition than me. I thank Allah that he gave me a so comfortable and restful life but I also want that my wishes and my desires will come true. Well, Allah knows each and every thing better than me. I cannot reach to His thoughts. Maybe He plans something good for me. That is why I cannot study further.

I am thankful to Him [Allah]. He has given me everything – every facility of life – but I do not know why not education. But *inshallah* one day I will start my studies again.<sup>43</sup>

My husband is good in many aspects but also a little bit bad in some

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<sup>42</sup> A FSc pre-medical study is a course which includes Physics, Chemistry and Biology for students who wish to go to medical colleges. There are other courses for FSc, which are pre-engineering, computer sciences and commerce.

<sup>43</sup> *Inshallah* is a translation of an Arabic phrase, *in shā' Allāh*, which means that "it is the will of God" or God's willing (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary 2010). When it is used, it usually means something will or will not happen.



things. I discussed with him many times about my education. He is also a well-educated and mature person. He can understand my feelings but I do not know why he doesn't want to understand some things I ask him. He just only wants me to sit at home and I should not go out. Sometimes I feel that he is a psycho person. Actually I think that he has a complicated mind because he is much older than me. He thinks if I go out, I will start liking someone else or I will get attached to another man.

My parents love me so much. In their opinion they found a good and mature person for me. And before my marriage my in-laws seem so good in front of my parents but now they are totally changed. They also promised my parents that they will let me study even after my marriage but now they are not fulfilling their promise.

Now my parents feel regretful when I ask them about my studies, even sometimes my mother starts weeping. Now she admits that she was wrong and I was right. But now I do not ask them for anything. I tell them that I am really happy with my husband because I do not want to see their tears. I do not want them to regret themselves on their decision of my life because I love them so much and they love me so much too.

In this case, Marufa gains comfort from religion but this also reflects how parents are obliged to marry their daughters to their relatives. Before the marriage, they thought that it would be good for Marufa to get married; they now realize that their daughter is not happy after marriage. Marufa explained the whole situation as the plan of God. She continues to fulfill her obligations to her parents, husband and in-laws to be a good wife but hides her sadness. Nonetheless, things can be more complicated than the previous narrative if this takes place as a transnational marriage. If Marufa were a transnational Pakistani woman in Hong Kong, she would be lonely in Hong Kong with her restrictive husband. In this sense, there are more problems for transnational Pakistani women as they are expected to fulfill their roles as mothers and wives, even though they hope for further education or work outside their homes.

Since Pakistani women may feel helpless and lonely as bride migrants, they have kept strong connections with their relatives in Pakistan who can comfort and encourage them. These Pakistani women may feel too stressed to live in Hong Kong without much support. Some of them may find it feasible to go to Pakistan to live for a few years when it becomes too expensive for them and their children to live in

Hong Kong. Therefore, the split household becomes very common among Pakistanis in Hong Kong, which I will now discuss.

## **Split Households**

As implied above, the split of household often results from transnational marriage because after the weddings in Pakistan, Pakistani men go to work in Hong Kong and tend to leave their wives in Pakistan (cf. White 1994). As mentioned in a previous chapter, there is a high male to female ratio among Pakistanis in the 2006 by-census in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:24). Also, over half of the married Pakistani women I interviewed have experienced separation with their husbands. Even though some informants are permanent residents of Hong Kong, they do not live in Hong Kong. Given that the split household constitutes an important period of life for Hong Kong Pakistani women, this section is devoted to their experience of separation from their husbands and children.

Why are Pakistani women and children separated from their husbands and fathers who work in Hong Kong? The first reason is that Pakistani men have a low salary in Hong Kong.<sup>44</sup> It is thus expensive for them to bring the spouses from Pakistan to Hong Kong, raise their children in Hong Kong and support the family members in Pakistan at the same time. The second reason is that Hong Kong does not provide an Islamic environment and thus may not be good as a place for female children to grow up. However, this is usually because parents do not have time to take care of their children, and therefore Pakistanis have to leave their children in Pakistan.<sup>45</sup> The third reason is that there is a rather clear definition of gender roles:

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<sup>44</sup> The median monthly income of Pakistani men is HKD9000 (Census and Statistics Department 2007b:75)

<sup>45</sup> This practice of transnational childcare is similar to many other migrants in the world: A number of



women should take care of the parents-in-law and children at home, which means that they should stay in the village in Pakistan. In some cases when both the husbands and wives live in Hong Kong, the couples leave one or two of their children in Pakistan with their in-laws. In other cases, the grown-up children move to Hong Kong one by one. The mother also travels between Hong Kong and Pakistan to take care of the family members in both places.

In the case of Adaza, she experienced a split household in her marriage; she took care of her children in Pakistan (see Chapter 3). Let me briefly recap her story here. After Adaza got married at the age of 18, she lived in Pakistan with her husband for around four years. Then in 1994, she traveled to Hong Kong with her daughter and husband and applied for permanent residency for her husband in Hong Kong. Although she could live in Hong Kong with her husband, she went back to live in Pakistan because her husband thought that he could save more money if he lived alone in Hong Kong. In addition, Adaza's parents, who were also in Pakistan at that time, could provide emotional and financial support to her. During the 14 years of the split household, she was once apart from her husband consecutively for four years – she did not see him for four years. When she was in Pakistan taking care of the children, her husband was in Hong Kong making money as a construction worker. Since 2005, Adaza first brought her youngest children to Hong Kong and then her elder children one by one because of limited financial resources. Adaza was considered lucky as she finally reunited with her husband in 2005 but some Pakistani families can be split between Hong Kong and Pakistan for over 20 years.

Adaza explained why she stayed in Pakistan for some years before she and

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immigrants in the United States send their children to their grandparents who live in the sending countries for childcare and socialization (George 2005:166, cf. Levitt 2001). In this way, the cost of the childcare is lowered and the quality of the childcare can be assured. Such acts again strengthen the ties between the migrants and their relatives in the sending country (George 2005:167).

her children finally settled in Hong Kong. She said,

My husband did not want me to go to Hong Kong before. He lives in a tiny room in Yuen Long. We Pakistani women have to follow and obey our husbands according to the Koran. Our husbands are responsible for taking care of us including providing necessities such as clothes and food. I am afraid of Allah, so I obey my husband.

Religion is often used by Adaza in explaining her and her husband's roles in the family. She emphasized that Islam (or the Koran) teaches her to obey her husband. However, I find that religion is subject to each Pakistani informant's interpretation to fit their changing gender relations as they live in Hong Kong. Although Adaza claimed that a woman should obey her husband, she seems to have negotiating power with her husband in terms of where to live and how much to spend on certain products and so on. She said, "Both men and women can be the heads of the households today." Sabira said that although financial problems make wives work outside the home in Hong Kong, ideally men should work outside the home and women should stay at home, according to Islam. This would make a happy family. She said,

The wife and husband are equal. If finances are not a problem, then she is the home minister. She has to clean the house, take care of the children and cook for the husband. She should also respect her husband's family, especially if they are living in the joint family household. When the husband comes back and sees the family, then he is happy. If he sees that the clothes are clean, and his wife and children are fine, he will relax. He would think "my wife is good," and he will love his wife more and more. The husband is the leader of the house. He has the responsibility to take care of the children and wife financially. He needs to work outside the home and of course it is the wife who teaches the children about Islam. The husband also needs to follow his role in Islam. But if the husband comes back home late, it does not mean that he did something wrong. He has to make a living and may love his family. I think that the man should spend the holidays with the wife. When the prophet gives the *chapatti* to his wife [supplies what is necessary or takes care of his wife], his wife feels satisfied that her husband is doing his job. He should be a very loving husband. Many of us forget that the Islamic book has shown us how to be a good wife and husband.

There are changes when financial problems cause stress in families. Some



Pakistani women have to work outside the home because of this, and this may disrupt the ideal roles of Pakistani women and men as stated in the Koran. However, this may mean that these Pakistani couples have to adjust their interpretation of the Koran and their Islamic teachings to fit the new gender roles in their families.

Adaza and Sabira are the lucky ones who have a happy marriage where they can negotiate with their husbands on the financial issues. However, there are some Pakistani women in Hong Kong who have little bargaining power and complained that their husbands want them to go back to Pakistan. One of my informants has a friend whose husband wants to send his wife back to Pakistan. She said,

My friend said that her husband asked her to go back to Pakistan. She said, "Why? Your family does not treat me well. I married you. Why should I go back?" She is worried and shocked. Her husband makes a good salary each month. He sends money and gets visa for his family members to Hong Kong for work but he does not want her to stay. He can afford to sponsor his relatives to Hong Kong. My friend was crying all night. She said, "If I am pregnant, I can stay in Hong Kong." She has four children born in Pakistan. Her husband wants the next child to be born in Hong Kong. So she said, "I want to get pregnant again."

Some Pakistani women live with their children in Pakistan. Others send their children to Pakistan for an Islamic environment and they stay in Hong Kong. Most want to bring up their children in a proper environment, which means giving children good moral values, education and chances to know about their religion and family tradition. Half of my married informants have considered sending or have sent their children to stay with their relatives in Pakistan. Sometimes, their children may be raised in Pakistan until they are three years old and then the parents start to bring them to Hong Kong for education. Some children study in Pakistan until they reach university level if their mothers are with them in Pakistan, such as Asba, who grew up in the urban area of Rawalpindi. When Asba and her siblings were small, they used to come to Hong Kong every year to see their father during school holidays. In



other cases, the married women settle down in Hong Kong, and then bring their children to Hong Kong one by one, as Adaza did.

Recently, more and more women have raised their children in Hong Kong and send them to Pakistan during the summer.<sup>46</sup> Bapsi, 27, sent her eldest daughter to Pakistan for the fresh air because she thought that the natural environment in her village was good for the breathing system of her eldest daughter.<sup>47</sup> In addition, one of Bapsi's twin daughters required serious medical attention. Bapsi and her husband then decided to send the healthy one to Pakistan and planned to leave her with her grandparents for three years. Bapsi thought that she could relax a bit because she does not have to take care of four children at one time.

Some informants and their husbands struggle between raising children in Hong Kong, a place with better education opportunities, and Pakistan, their home country with proper Islamic education. I doubt if Pakistanis, as an ethnic minority, receive good education in Hong Kong. I also wonder if proper Islamic education is only available in Pakistan as my informants also find various *madrassa* for their children in Hong Kong. But in any case, due to the high living standard in Hong Kong and the limited income of their husbands, most Pakistani women in Hong Kong have temporarily lived in Pakistan while their husbands work in Hong Kong. Sometimes they are left in Pakistan. Sometimes they live in Hong Kong. If Pakistani women stay in Pakistan away from their husbands who are in Hong Kong, this may

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<sup>46</sup> Informants explained that more and more Pakistani women want to live with their husbands in Hong Kong so that their husbands would not be able to have extra-marital affairs easily. Their parents-in-law also become open-minded and let their daughters-in-law move to Hong Kong with their sons. Some Pakistani women who came in the last ten years are much more educated than those who came in the 1970s. The educated ones have greater adaptability to the living environment in Hong Kong.

<sup>47</sup> When Bapsi's elder daughter was in the grandfather's home in Pakistan, she was bored. She was not allowed to go out for a walk or to meet with other children. In Hong Kong, she gets online on Facebook and visits other children to play with dolls and kitchen ware. Whereas in Pakistan, she could not meet any friends or go out of the house without being accompanied. She was upset to be in Pakistan and longed to go back to Hong Kong, where her family lives (see Chapter 3).



also strengthen the bonding between the husbands and wives because they have to handle problems together and hence cooperation is needed (Khan 1980:281).<sup>48</sup> This also results in frequent travel by Pakistani women and their husbands between Hong Kong and Pakistan.

### **Extra-marital Affairs and Divorce**

Pakistani women who often are in Pakistan either temporally or permanently are worried that their husbands in Hong Kong will not be faithful to them. This is why some Pakistani women eventually come to Hong Kong to reunite with their husbands. Those Pakistani women who have to take care of two households (one in Hong Kong and one in Pakistan) are often separated from their husbands. Such separation brings insecurity to these Pakistani women as they are concerned about whether their husbands may have extra-marital affairs when they are away from Hong Kong. There are rumors about some Pakistani men who look for Indonesian or Filipino girlfriends when their wives are not in Hong Kong. All my informants have heard the rumors about the Pakistani men and Indonesian domestic workers who get together. They are considered "lonely" and "free" because they both lack the opposite sex in the community: Pakistani men have their wives in Pakistan and Indonesian domestic workers leave their husbands in Indonesia. In some extreme cases, Pakistani men bring their Indonesian girlfriends to their home while their Pakistani wives live under the same roof. They bring their girlfriends home even when their wives are there. However, some Pakistani women do not speak up or reject such behavior by their

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<sup>48</sup> As Khan (1980:281) writes, "The early years of separation due to the migration process, and the husbands working at a long distance from home may produce tensions between husband and wife resulting from their different aspirations and experiences and yet the couple's earlier acquisition of household and parental responsibilities, their relative freedom of elders and particularly the loss of alternative support (in the 'woman's world and man's world') encourages a closer relationship between husband and wife."

husbands. They explain that men need to release their sexual desire when their wives are not in Hong Kong, so Pakistani women treat these affairs outside marriage with “one eye open, one eye closed”. One of my informants who is in her late twenties does not like Indonesian women and Pakistani men going out. She said,

One day I saw a Pakistani man and an Indonesian woman sitting in the park. I knew they were together. Those Indonesian maids should go back to their home countries. They flirt with our men and this makes our men bad. The wives of these Pakistani men are not in Hong Kong. In the weekend, these men go to find women for their sexual satisfaction.

Pakistani women may blame other women for the immoral acts of Pakistani men. Nonetheless, it shows that my informants are aware of the situation, of Pakistani men having extra-marital affairs. They hope for a change in familial and marital relations in the Pakistani community. They spot Pakistani men who go out with other women and gossip about this to try to contain the spread of the problem. Such social problems reflect the impact of the split household on Pakistani women in Hong Kong.

There is a noteworthy divorce of a couple separated between Hong Kong, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Husna lived in Pakistan with her mother-in-law after marriage while her husband, Adnaan, worked in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom for an airline company.<sup>49</sup> Two years ago, Husna found that her husband had changed his attitude toward her when they were on the phone. Adnaan treated her coldly even when he came back to Pakistan to visit her and their children.<sup>50</sup> Husna said,

I did not ask him what had happened when I was in Pakistan. But you know, women have the sixth sense. He changed his behavior totally and did not talk to me. After he went to Pakistan, he just talked to his family members. He

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, Husna is Adnaan's second wife as Adnaan divorced his first wife, who lives in Pakistan. Husna sometimes referred the Chinese woman Adnaan married as the “third wife” during our conversation.

<sup>50</sup> The names given in this thesis, except representatives of certain organizations, are pseudonyms.



shared the bed with his mother but did not sleep with me. I realized that there was something wrong. I checked his wallet and saw that he had a picture with a Chinese woman and their daughter. The Chinese woman sat on his right thigh and the daughter was held on his left arm. I did not even have any pictures with him and my two kids like this. When I asked him, "Why don't you talk to me?" He said, "I am tired. Don't talk to me. Don't disturb me." I said, I stayed next to him, and said, "I will apologize if I did anything wrong." He urged me to go away and I went back to my room. Around 4am, when I woke up to pray, I saw him sitting in the dark and talking on the phone. He talked in English, but when he saw me, he changed to Cantonese. He knew that I would understand English. Why would he sit there and talk on phone in the dark at 4am?

Another big argument and deception by her husband was the visa application of Husna and her two children. Husna said,

I called him, I said, "I know your marriage (with the Chinese woman). Do you know that my visa is going to be expired? My visa must be renewed within one year. You have to come back! You have all my documents: my passport, identification card, and the children's passports. It's your duty." He said, "I do not have your passports. If I have them, it's my duty." [The passports were locked in the cupboard of the house by her mother-in-law.] After some conversations, he changed his wording and attitude and said, "I will apply for you later." Sometime later, he said that the expiry date was December 29, 2008. He claimed that the visa was expired. My mother-in-law asked him to cancel my visa. She thought, "We will live in Hong Kong without her [Husna]." Then I thought, Okay, if you treated me so badly, I cannot bear this for my kids anymore. One day, I saw the key of the cupboard was left on the lock of the cupboard, so I went into the room and opened the cupboard and I got hold of my and my children's passports...

That Chinese woman is illegal. He thought that I lived in Pakistan and could not come to Hong Kong. My sister-in-law and mother-in-law must have thought so too.

I did not tell my mother-in-law about finding the passports of course. I found that the expiry date of my visa was January 29, 2009, instead of December 29, 2008. He lied! He thought that I was stupid. He thought that I did not know the immigration policies and was an illiterate woman....I told my mother-in-law that I wanted to go to see my mom with the children the next day. She was okay with it. Then I called my friends and asked for their advice. I asked them, "Should I go to Hong Kong?" They said, "You do not know anything about Hong Kong!" I said, "But I have some friends in Hong Kong and I would ask them if they could help me if I go to Hong Kong." I arranged tickets immediately and flew to Hong Kong the next day.

Before Husna came to Hong Kong, she called her friend living in Hong Kong and sought her help, but her friend could not help her because her husband did not approve it. Husna then contacted another woman, Jannat, whom Husna had met a



few times in Hong Kong.<sup>51</sup> Jannat agreed to pick Husna up at the airport and let her stay overnight at her home. Jannat then introduced Leila, a Pakistani community service center worker, who assisted Husna to stay in the family crisis unit.<sup>52</sup> At the family crisis centre, Husna called her husband and this was how the whole fight started in Hong Kong. She said,

When I called him [her husband], he was surprised. He saw the number on his cell phone. He must have thought, "How could she come to Hong Kong?" Then I said to him, "As you know I am in Hong Kong..." He said, "I do not care." He cut the line immediately. Then the social worker called him, and said, "Your wife has come to Hong Kong. I would like to arrange a meeting with you and your wife." The social worker arranged the meeting and translator for me. When he came to the centre and met me, he immediately said, "I, Adnaan, divorce you...Husna. [*talaq* - divorce]." <sup>53</sup>I told him, "You just give permission for me to live with my kids. You can live with your [Chinese] wife. I won't say anything. Then, he said "*talaq*" again and asked me to go back to Pakistan.

Later, my sister-in-law [Raani] came to the center and said to the social worker, "We want to meet the children." I said, "No. I do not allow you to do so." The social worker said, "It is okay. This is your [Husna's] right." The next day, I thought, maybe it was because my social worker who disclosed my living place and caused so many trouble. I warned my social worker, "If there is something wrong again, you have to be responsible."

My sister-in-law brought canned milk powder to the children to my shelter. The social worker said, "Your in-laws are very loving and nice. You are wrong. Your in-law is right. They said, 'We just bring milk powder for the children.'" But I was very insecure. My husband might have added poison to the milk. Anything can go wrong! Okay. I told the social worker, "You can give the milk powder to anyone. I don't want their gifts."

It seems that Husna did not want to get divorced in the first place like most

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<sup>51</sup> Through Husna's case, we can see the power of a women-centered network between Hong Kong and Pakistan. As Harris and Shaw (2009:117) write, "women-centred networks could undermine and even subvert the authority of their husbands and other senior male kin".

<sup>52</sup> Under the law of Hong Kong, victims of domestic violence are under protection. If a person assaults/threatens his/her spouse and their children, the spouse can report the matter to the police. If they do not have immediate danger from their spouses or they do not want their spouses to be arrested, they can contact the Social Welfare Department or one of the voluntary agencies such as the Family Crisis Support Centre operated by Caritas-HK (with a 24-hour hotline: 18288). (Community Legal Information Centre 2010)

<sup>53</sup> According to Lewis (2009: 114), "a man can divorce his wife by simple repudiation (*talaq*), at his discretion. No reason or justification is required, but the circumstances are elaborately regulated in the Koran, which devotes a whole chapter to this topic....a wife cannot divorce her husband, but can appeal to a judge to order her husband to divorce her." However, Husna is in a totally different legal system in Hong Kong, where she initiated the separation and fight for child custody.



other Pakistani women in Hong Kong. Husna was also very strong and determined when she confronted her husband. She said,

If he gave me and my kids' daily maintenance [financial support], it's okay if he did not like me. He asked why I did not go back to my mother's home. I wondered: I did not get married by myself. You, your family arranged this marriage. This is your wish. Why would I go back to my mother's home? I told him, "I will die at your home!" He called my sister and asked her to take me back to Pakistan! He said, "I will arrange everything." I told my sister, "Don't talk to me on his behalf!" How can I go back home? I have two kids. My seven sisters and one brother are all married. My mother has cancer of the last stage. Who will take care of me if I go back? Did I do anything wrong? He had already got a Chinese woman. If he gave me money and allowed me to live in my in-law's home as well as the visa to Hong Kong, I would be okay with it.

In the end, Husna and Adnaan still went for divorce and fought for child custody after a one-month negotiation through the mediation of the family crisis unit. Husna planned to live in Hong Kong and was given a subsidy of HKD2500 each month and a tiny room, with the rent paid by the Social Welfare Department. If Husna had given birth to her sons in Pakistan, she would not have the opportunities to receive HKD2500 on behalf of her children who were born in Hong Kong. There are significant differences in the institutional support between Hong Kong and Pakistan. "Husna has welfare support because of her two children. Christian Action [a non-governmental organization] gave her LCD television, fridge and fan. What will Pakistani government give her? Nothing!" Jannat said. Under the policies of the Pakistani government, there is little protection for women. The right to divorce is granted to the men in Islam while women cannot divorce their husbands but can appeal to the courts (Lewis and Churchill 2009: 114).<sup>54</sup> However, as Husna is alone

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<sup>54</sup> In Pakistan, women who are divorced cannot get any governmental assistance or financial aids. They can only raise the children and earn money on their own. But if they are fortunate enough, they can rely on the help of their own parents. During the visit to Pakistan, I met two Pakistani women who have to take care of the financial needs of their children, because one is a divorcee, another one is a widow. They both live in villages and rely on the help of their maternal family members, especially their parents. Both of them worked to make a living for their children. One worked as a kindergarten teacher while another one was a nurse.



in Hong Kong and with a not-very-helpful social worker, her emotional support in Hong Kong may not be as good as that in Pakistan.<sup>55</sup>

Since there are numerous challenges and efforts to get child custody, Husna was also surprised at what she has done so far. She said,

I was also surprised how I could do so many things. I sold my gold and bought air tickets to Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government gave me temporary ID card and money for my kids each month. The government paid for my rent. Christian Action gave me food from their food bank for one month. They also gave me all these electrical appliances. My social worker helped me with another HKD1000 from the organization [after Husna got aid through Sabira, the social worker mentioned previously reapplied for more grants for her].

Moreover, Husna decided to make a living in Hong Kong. She said, "I am an educated woman. When the kids go to school, I will work." She studied until metric level, which was around nine years of education. It will be hard for her to survive in Hong Kong but at least she can make use of her own networks and Hong Kong governmental and non-governmental support to seek a better life.

However, the story did not end here: Husna not only had to fight with her husband but also her sister-in-law. Husna said, "My sister-in-law also threatened me through text messages that they would complain to the police. Later the policemen said that the case was closed because it was just a fight." Husna's mother-in-law and sister-in-law called relatives and friends in Hong Kong and Pakistan and said that she was a bad woman and tried to poison them. Husna's friend said, "If Husna poisoned her, why is she still alive?" As a single mother who has two children, Husna expects that people would talk behind her back because divorce is not honorable for Pakistani women.

Seeing all these accusations, Husna told her family and friends what actually

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<sup>55</sup> Husna's social worker seemed to stand on the side of Adnaan and was not able to secure financial aid for Husna in the beginning.



happened in Hong Kong. She called her mother in Pakistan and told her how badly her in-laws behaved in Hong Kong. Naturally, Husna gained the support from her family members to divorce. She told them how her husband wanted to get the two children from her through the police. She accused her mother-in-law of planning to send her children to the United Kingdom before she obtained custody of them. This news was widely spread among the family members and friends of Husna in Pakistan and Hong Kong, so Husna's mother-in-law was blamed when she called or went to Pakistan. This was seen as the success of Husna in fighting against her mother-in-law and husband. She said,

Everyone knows that my mother-in-law and sister-in-law treated me very badly. If you just talked to my mother-in-law for five minutes, she would say bad words about me. When Jannat met with her, my mother-in-law made wrong judgment on me. Jannat said, "I didn't know that your in-law was so bad..." My mother-in-law told everyone that I am short, thin and ugly. She said that I stole her gold from Pakistan. However, everyone knows that my mother-in-law is not good. My mother-in-law is not happy because even her children blame her for stirring up trouble.

As mentioned, Husna tried to obtain legal custody of the children provoking her in-laws, so her in-laws threatened her and her friends and badmouthed her in front of other Pakistani women in the community. For example, the friends of Husna were threatened on the phone by her sister-in-law so that no one would help her and this triggered conflicts among other Pakistani women.<sup>56</sup> This divorce not only reflects her troubled life and conflicts between her and her husband, but also conflicts between the friends involved.

An argument arose from Jannat helping Husna to get assistance from social workers. However, Husna's sister-in-law, Raani, and Jannat live in the same estate.

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<sup>56</sup> One day, Husna came across her sister-in-law in the market. Her sister-in-law immediately took out her mobile phone and took pictures of Husna. She found it disturbing and ran away with her children. When Husna goes out to go somewhere far away, she has to wear a mask, for fear of being seen by her sister-in-law.

As both Jannat and Raani live in the same housing estate, they share a number of common friends and it is easy for them to gossip in the community. Raani was upset with Jannat because if Jannat had not intervened, Husna would not have been able to get legal aid and welfare to stay in Hong Kong for the divorce case. Raani got the phone number of Jannat's husband through their son who played in the park of the estate. She called Zafar and accused Jannat of being too nosy.

This started a fight between Jannat and Zafar, her husband, who had already been dissatisfied with each other. This fight happened when I was at their home. Zafar asked Jannat, "Do you know if you are doing the right thing? What if Husna tells lies? Maybe she just wants the Hong Kong permanent residency!" Jannat said, "I know she didn't lie. She would not divorce for the permanent residency. Raani asked you to blame me for becoming involved in this. I knew what she wanted to do!"

A few minutes later, the argument became fierce and Jannat was clearly upset with Zafar, so she replied by saying, "You always complain! 'This is not clean. This is messy!' Don't say that to me!" Zafar then replied and also looked at me to seek my support, "She didn't say who painted the walls of this home. Do you expect me to do the dishes after working a long day?" The fight between Jannat and Zafar was expected as I knew that they did not have a good relationship. When Jannat went into the kitchen, Zafar said to me, "She just started working for three months." He implied that she did not have an excuse not neglect the housework. Zafar even complained about her talking on the phone with mysterious people.

Helping Husna or becoming involved in the marriage problems of other families can bring troubles to others like Jannat and Zafar. Husna's case also affected the other transnational marriages of Adnaan's siblings since their family's reputation



had worsened. The two unmarried sisters and the brother in her ex-husband's family have a limited chance to get married because the mother-in-law is not an easygoing person and this is the second divorce of Adnaan.

In the case of Husna, we can understand how conflicts between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law may happen in Hong Kong and Pakistan. The conflicts with the in-laws extend to family members across borders, which make the relations more complicated. This is because peer pressure and gossip work transnationally, between Pakistani women in Hong Kong and their relatives in Pakistan. Pakistani women face pressure not only within their family or community in Hong Kong but across borders because secrets can be difficult to keep given international phone calls and trips to Pakistan. For example, Pakistani women would gossip over who cheats the government and gets social welfare from the government or who has divorced her husband. This sometimes serves as a control or check among Pakistani women.

Such conflicts with in-laws, which go hand-in-hand with gossip in Hong Kong, are very common as commented by my informants. It appears to me that the conflicts are as common as they are shown in Indian or Hong Kong Chinese television dramas. Thus, many informants would like to "escape the experience of having to live with their in-laws after marriage" (Harris and Shaw 2009:121). However, this also means that they have less help with childcare. Among British Pakistanis, such changes of residence from joint family household to nuclear household imply the "transformation of gender relations" (Harris and Shaw 2009:121). It is possible for gender relations to transform among Pakistanis in Hong Kong, as discussed in Chapter 3.

## Conflicts with In-laws

The following story is important for understanding the difficult lives of Pakistani women. They have to deal with separate households between Hong Kong and Pakistan on their own with their mothers-in-law, who are not kind or helpful. Parwin, 52, lives in Pakistan most of the time but she visits Hong Kong for a few months every year. Parwin spoke of her tough life in Pakistan with me: She was married in the early 1970s but was not allowed to go to Hong Kong. Her husband obtained a passport for her and planned to bring her to Hong Kong. Nonetheless, Parwin did not go to Hong Kong because her mother-in-law did not allow her to do so. She had to stay with her mother-in-law, who did not respect her and care about her. Parwin only had one pair of shoes and when they were torn, she did not have money to buy a new pair. Her mother-in-law controlled the finances of the household because all the men in the family had moved out of the village to work. Parwin also risked her life when giving birth. She said in Punjabi and her daughter translated the following to me:

No one came to assist me when I gave birth to my sons and daughter. I just lay there. My daughter was dropped next to an electric heater and therefore she survived the cold weather. My mother-in-law said that she would come when I gave birth but she did not. When my eldest daughter, who was 12 years old at that time, found that I had given birth, she called the midwife for us.

Two years after her youngest daughter was born, Parwin moved to Rawalpindi in Pakistan and lived in an apartment with her children to avoid further conflicts with her mother-in-law.

The experience of Parwin has reflected how Pakistani women may be exploited by their mother-in-law and how they lead their transnational lives because of the split of households. However, Parwin was considered lucky because her husband could afford for her to move to the city rather than staying in the village



with her mother-in-law. Otherwise, she might have suffered even more than this.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has illustrated how Pakistani women live in Hong Kong and in Pakistan as marriage partners and mothers as well as in-laws. Just because Hong Kong seems to be a liberating place for Pakistani women under “patriarchal oppressions” does not mean that they will necessarily be “freer” in Hong Kong (cf. George 2005:165). Although they may seem to be free to live in their own ways because they enjoy the stability and safety in Hong Kong, they are aware of their roles as modest marriage partners and mothers, and are subject to peer pressure, such as watchful eyes and gossip, in the Pakistani community. There are some moral values, which they are subject to, which extend and continue in Hong Kong, as Pakistani women are very connected with their relatives in other parts of the world. As George (2006:18), who studies nurses from Kerala, India in the United States, comments,

...while transnational connections are a valuable resource for the economic and social reproduction of the immigrant community, they also help reproduce established gender- and class-based power relations. Immigrants’ identities remain oriented to Kerala as a result of concrete practices largely organized through relationships with family members left behind in Kerala, practices such as finding marriage partners and help with raising children. These practices foster the reproduction in the United States of family forms and gender roles rooted in Kerala.

By the same token, through the transnational connections via marriages and visits, “gender and class-based” power relations are reproduced in the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. Such relations are not only reproduced in the migrant community but also negotiated and reconstructed (cf. Wilson 2006). In the case of Pakistani women in Hong Kong, I argue that there is both continuity and renegotiation of gender roles and relations.

In the next chapter, I examine how Pakistani women see their physical and

cognitive homes in Hong Kong and Pakistan.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Sense of Home**

#### **Introduction**

The transnational lives of Pakistani women between Hong Kong and Pakistan were examined in the previous chapters. This chapter analyzes the concepts of home for Pakistani women in Hong Kong in two senses: physical and cognitive. Physical homes refer to their actual flats or houses that Pakistani women live in, including the materials and designs of those houses in Hong Kong and Pakistan. Cognitive home refers to where people feel that they belong, which is formulated by their memories, present situation and future plans (c.f Salih 2003:70). My informants' cognitive homes can be Hong Kong or Pakistan, which exist in their minds and are also reflected by their physical homes.

By saying Pakistani women are “between homes”, I mean that the Pakistani women I interviewed have multiple definitions and concepts of homes and have not settled themselves in one particular home. In the following section, I describe how physical homes of Pakistani women are decorated and constructed in Hong Kong and Pakistan. With the symbolic meanings carried by the new furniture acquired in Hong Kong and Pakistan, my informants' views of home can be reflected. My informants may have great expectations of improving their living standard or styles of life in Hong Kong. Such desire is reflected through their choices of furniture and decoration at home. Their newly decorated home contrasts with their parents' home in Pakistan in their memory. As they buy new furniture and electrical appliances for use in Hong Kong or Pakistan, they may find that they are consuming a new social status and sense of modernity. These electrical appliances or new furniture were not accessible

to them before they settled down in Hong Kong as they were lower class in Pakistan in the past. With these new furniture and high-tech appliances entering their homes in Hong Kong or Pakistan, their sense of identity shifts to a middle-class identity, and that of an overseas countryman. To conclude, I argue that the physical homes can reflect the sense of home and identity of Pakistani women in Hong Kong.

## **Making Homes in Hong Kong and Pakistan**

Before we examine how Pakistani women design their flats in Hong Kong and houses in Pakistan, let me give a brief explanation of the housing situation in Hong Kong. As Pakistanis in Hong Kong are generally poor, the housing they live in is usually in bad condition, such as old private housing in a crowded urban area with various urban problems. The environment of the private buildings that Pakistanis live in is not as spacious, clean and well-maintained as public housing. If they live in public housing estates in Hong Kong, they are the lucky few because most Pakistanis do not even know the criteria for the application of public housing (Ku et al 2003:56). Although there is a great variety of private housing in Hong Kong, Pakistanis are too poor to afford the high-quality ones. When they want to rent flats, they often face rejection by the owners or estate agencies because they are Pakistanis (Ku et al 2003:56). Among the nineteen Pakistani families I visited, the sizes of the flats were usually between 300 square feet (for families of three to five members) and 500 square feet (for families of six to eight members). In addition, Pakistani women stay in places near the city centre so that their husbands can travel to work from home in a short period of time. Thus, if they are not lucky enough to be allocated flats in public housing estates near their husbands' workplaces, they may refuse to accept the flat allocated.



My informants' homes in Hong Kong look similar to the average Hong Kong Chinese home due to the constraints of the building structure and limited space in Hong Kong. However, various decorations in Pakistani homes reflect their view of modernity, their adjustment to the environment of Hong Kong and their re-establishment of Pakistani-style homes. Below I compare the homes of Pakistani women in Hong Kong with their homes in Pakistan.

Among the fifteen families I visited in Hong Kong, only half of them have dining tables at home. This is due to the limited space of flats in Hong Kong and the eating habits of Pakistanis. In Hong Kong, almost all informants sit on the floor when they have meals, despite the fact that one of the richest informants felt surprised that I sat on the floor with other Pakistanis during meals. I observed that my informants always sit on the floor during meals, with a cloth or newspapers placed above the mat or carpet even if they have dining tables in their homes, in both Hong Kong and Pakistan.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, when I went to Pakistan with Jannat, I never dined sitting on a chair during meals at her home, because it is not customary to do so in her family. But this does not apply to the other two informants whom I visited in the summer in Pakistan. During my trip to Pakistan, I found that Asba dined on the bed, on the floor, and sometimes at the dining table. Adaza asked me to take a seat at the dining table at her home in Pakistan but she seldom did. Her children, however, had breakfast sitting around the dining table with me every morning in Pakistan. Is having a dining table a sign of modernity? Why would they have dining tables in their homes in Hong Kong, and sometimes in Pakistan? When asked about what dining tables are for, Sabira said,

Dining tables are for decoration and guests. We don't use them for dinner. If

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<sup>57</sup> If I have dinner with my informants, I never sit at the dining table but on the floor although I am served at the dining table if I eat alone in their flats.

the guests are Muslims, then they can sit on the floor. If some other friends come, like Chinese, sitting on the floor is not good in their culture. So it depends on people's culture. It's our prophet's practice to sit while having dinner. People who eat on the tables are usually educated and "high class". It's up to the family. If the family is educated, they may prefer eating at the dining tables...It's some kind of modernism. There are no problems to do both.

On the one hand, Pakistani women use dining tables in their flats to show modernity. On the other hand, they equip the bathrooms in the so-called "Muslim or Pakistani" way in Hong Kong. In Pakistan, tissues are usually not provided; rather, there are small teapot-style buckets with water. However, these teapot buckets, which are used by Muslims to clean the bodies after going to the toilet, are not found in markets in Hong Kong. Instead, they use mugs to replace the buckets. In the homes of my informants, some equip their bathrooms with tissues, although this is not very common.

Pakistani women also buy new furniture to show their modernity and improve their quality of life when they can afford it in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. How do Pakistani women improve their flats in Hong Kong? As of the summer of 2008, a few of my key informants had already bought new carpets, televisions, cupboards and sofas to replace their old ones in Hong Kong. They are keen on equipping their homes with brand new furniture and electrical appliances. If Pakistani women save enough money, they would prefer LCD televisions or even televisions with plasma display technology, but most families would spend money on other things such as a computer desk, a computer, a cupboard or a sofa. Televisions are very important electrical appliances because they are the main source of entertainment for those who do not use computers. However, some Pakistani women in Hong Kong are poor so they can only buy one piece of furniture or electrical appliances when they have money to spare. Adaza claimed that she used her



children's transportation fees from the government to buy a television cabinet.



Figure 6.1: This carpet was taken from Pakistan to Hong Kong. It is used to give the home a feeling of living in Pakistan because Pakistan is a country known for making high-quality carpets. Although informants live in Hong Kong, they can still enjoy the design they used to have in Pakistan. Most of my informants bring handicrafts from Pakistan to Hong Kong or they sometimes buy products looking “Pakistani” from mainland China to decorate their homes.

There are a few things which distinguish Hong Kong Pakistani homes from Hong Kong Chinese homes. For example, there are usually red papers, *Fàì Chun*, used for decorations in Chinese New Year at the doors of Hong Kong Chinese homes. However, at the doors of Pakistani homes, there are Islamic verses in Arabic, usually on black paper with golden letters. To locate the home of Pakistani friends in Hong Kong, my informants look for the Koran verses on the doors, so there is almost no need to remember the number of the flat. For very poor families, there are almost no decorations on the wall except pictures of Mecca and Koran scripture. But many other Pakistani homes also have verses of the Koran on the wall as decorations or reminders. Some stick the Islamic calendar on the refrigerator in the kitchen to remind them of the dates of festivals.

Other decorations in the flats of Pakistanis in Hong Kong show their acceptance of certain common practices of Hong Kong Chinese families. This includes the display of Western wedding pictures of family members. Displaying



wedding pictures in Pakistani dress or pictures of older family members is common among Pakistani families in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, showing the wedding pictures in white bridal dress is extremely rare: only one of the fifteen households I visited has such a display. In the picture, the mother was wearing a low-cut Western bridal dress, which was considered very fashionable of her to do back in the early 1990s. They were a very unusual Pakistani family, who would go to the photography studio to take family pictures. The 24-inch Western wedding picture was hung right above the television. This shows their social status and the westernization of their lifestyles when compared to other Pakistani families in Hong Kong. Most other families would not spend this amount of money, at least several thousand Hong Kong dollars, for one set of pictures taken at a photography studio.

In order to enjoy Indian or Pakistani media content in Hong Kong, many Pakistani women used an illegal cable card to watch the Zee TV Asia Pacific channel and STAR TV's Indian channels, which are considered more entertaining than Pakistani channels.<sup>58</sup> The Indian channels are essential for Pakistanis because the Bollywood music and television dramas are very much to their taste. Almost all informants watch Star TV in Hong Kong every day. Thus, televisions are important electrical appliances for Pakistani women because the Indian or Pakistani television channels keep them connected to Pakistan and to their culture. Watching Indian television dramas and putting Islamic scriptures on their walls show that Pakistani women in Hong Kong have lives similar to that in Pakistan. Sometimes, informants

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<sup>58</sup> STAR TV is an Asia-based satellite television broadcast company with headquarters in Hong Kong, and regional offices in India and China. There are at least three Hindi channels: Star One, Star Plus and Star News (Wikipedia 2010). Zee TV is one of the well-known brands of Zee Entertainment Enterprises, which "is one of India's leading television, media and entertainment companies" (Zee Television Corporate Website 2010). "With a reach of more than 138 countries and access to more than 500 million viewers globally, Zee TV has created strong brand equity and is the largest media franchise serving the South Asian Diaspora." (Zee TV Asia Pacific 2010). The only Pakistani channel was blocked after I started my fieldwork in September 2008, but in any case Pakistani channels could not arouse the interest of my informants. My informants pay HKD138 a month to Cable Television to watch Star Hindi music and drama channels.



take sewing machines, clothes, carpets, VCDs and DVDs from Pakistan to Hong Kong (see Figure 6.1). To bring these products from Pakistan means that Pakistani women extend their lifestyle in Pakistan to Hong Kong. They can also keep updated with the pop culture in Pakistan and hence preserve their identities as Pakistanis in Hong Kong.

Homes in Hong Kong must be equipped with utensils and ingredients for cooking Pakistani food, which gives them a sense of belonging to Pakistan. These utensils include the *chapatti* pans, deep pots for making curry, and pots for making tea, as well as various kinds of spices. Without proper utensils, *chapatti* can still be made but it would not have the same feeling as “authentic” Pakistani food. Similarly, many ingredients are also transported from Pakistan to Hong Kong, including chicken essence even though these spices can also be found in South Asian shops and mainstream supermarkets in Hong Kong. Therefore, my informants do not have to get ingredients through Pakistani friends, although many still do because of the cheaper price in Pakistan. If it is in season, they bring boxes of mangoes from Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> Food stored in their kitchens or bought from Pakistan is essential for making the home of Pakistani women and giving a sense of belonging to that society (Salih 2003:70). No matter where the Pakistani food is bought from, the sense of belonging is directed toward Pakistan. This is because “the consumption of food is a symbolic incorporation of the place it recalls.” (Salih 2003:70). The smells and tastes of the food make Pakistani homes in Hong Kong unique, and many Hong Kong Chinese use the “smell of curry” to identify the homes of Pakistanis in the neighborhood.

Pakistani women who make their homes in Hong Kong are keen to display

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<sup>59</sup> Fruits and *chapatti* are not prohibited from being imported to Hong Kong under Hong Kong law according to the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department (2010).

their culture through food and drinks when treating guests of Hong Kong Chinese origin (cf. Salih 2003). Once, an informant showed off very expensive nuts, *chigoza* pine nuts, that she purchased from Pakistan (see Figure 6.2).<sup>60</sup> These kind of nuts cost HKD100 per kilogram. The informant proudly introduced me to this kind of nut and used her English-Urdu dictionary to show me the knowledge about *chigoza*. This is how they use food to build their sense of home and to reaffirm their identity as Pakistanis.

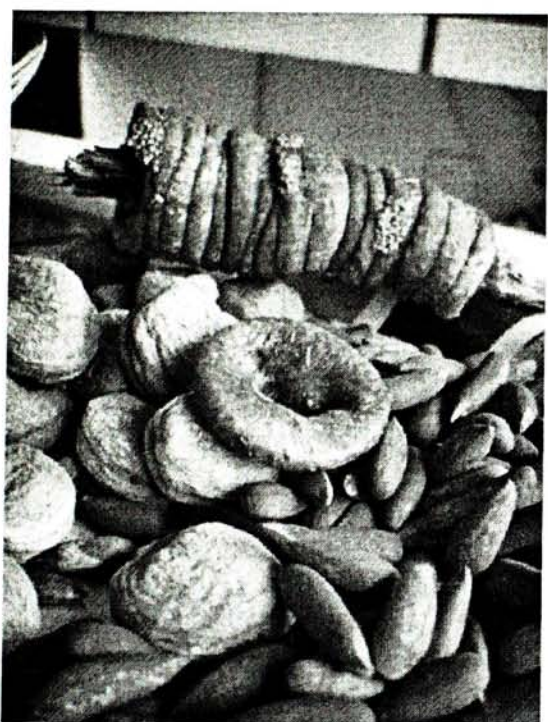


Figure 6.2: These are nuts and dried fruits served by my informants. Consuming food from Pakistan is one of the ways of maintaining their Pakistani identities in Hong Kong. The nuts on the right are *chigoza*. These expensive nuts cannot be found in Hong Kong.

My informants make use of their household design, food products bought from Pakistan or television programmes in Hong Kong to maintain, if not to strengthen, their sense of belonging to Pakistan. Such decorations, food products and entertainment are important for them because the overall environment is dominated by Hong Kong Chinese culture – only the decoration of home and food consumed

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<sup>60</sup> *Chigoza* are good for health because it contains much protein and dietary fiber. It takes 18 months for them to mature in pine trees and not all of them are large enough for human consumption. It is commonly found in Indian markets (Kosmix 2010).



can be chosen according to their taste. When my informants equip their homes with certain Pakistani or Islamic features, these products give them a feeling of their home and a sense of belonging to Pakistan. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that they also make use of electrical appliances and other decorations to raise their social status and embrace a sense of modernity.

Building houses in Pakistan plays a similar role for Pakistani women. It consolidates their sense of belonging to Pakistan and also gives them a sense of superiority and modernity. Let me explain why and how Pakistani women build or buy new homes in Pakistan to show their modernity. Among my informants who have houses in Pakistan, it is usually their husbands who suggested buying land, or building houses in Pakistan near their husbands' hometown. Buying houses is driven by the pressure from the relatives who think that Pakistanis in Hong Kong, or overseas in general, should be able to afford new land and properties in Pakistan. Adaza once said, "If you do not have a house in Pakistan, they would look down upon you and talk about you behind your back. They would say, 'He has been in Hong Kong for so many years, but he cannot even afford a house.'" Therefore, some of my informants supported their husbands to go back to Pakistan and build houses in Pakistan. When I followed my informant, Adaza, back to Pakistan, her husband had already decorated the new house. After her husband left for Hong Kong, Adaza went to buy new electrical appliances on behalf of her husband in Pakistan. My informants and their husbands' social status rise because their husbands have the financial ability to buy or construct new houses.

Pakistani women can buy a piece of land near their in-laws' home and build a house on it when they have money, so houses are constructed over many years. Some Pakistani women have enough money to buy houses in the cities, where there are

better educational opportunities for their children. Others may spend money on improving their houses in the villages by equipping them with brand new furniture and electrical appliances. Or they may buy houses in the newly developed areas, where foreign companies participate in the development and brand the area as middle or higher-income housing. Jannat used her husband's savings to buy a single-storey house of five *marla*, in Bahria Town, which was still under construction.<sup>61</sup> It cost PKR3,199,000 (around USD40,000) in January 2009. Bahria Town a private housing estate located in a newly developed area in Islamabad, is regarded as a development of the "highest standard".<sup>62</sup> Other housing estates near Bahria Town are called Garden City and Safari Homes. Jannat's sister also bought a house in Bahria Town. The brother of her brother-in-law, who lives in the United Kingdom, has the same kind of house and it is situated right next to theirs. This kind of house is furnished with luxurious imported furniture and electrical appliances, including an oven and a shower cubicle with massage functions. To Jannat, homes are important for giving her and her husband a place to stay after retirement and this land and property are also for investment.

A good quality of life has to be ensured in Pakistan when Pakistani women go back to live in their newly built houses. For instance, they want their houses to be equipped well enough so that their children will feel comfortable living there in the future. Their houses are often installed with "Uninterrupted Power Supply" (UPS) systems with battery back up when there is power outage. Many households were

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<sup>61</sup> One marla equals to 272.25 sq feet.

<sup>62</sup> Bahria Town's website says, "Bahria Township located in Rawalpindi/Islamabad districts and at Lahore present the highest standards of town-development ever achieved in Pakistan. Street layout emulates a design picked from Reston, Virginia, USA. The added advantage of being located along Soan River with Safari Park and Takht Pari hills in the background adds to the beauty of the Township at Rawalpindi/Islamabad while Lahore Canal creates a cool serene impression in our Lahore property" (Bahria Town 2010)



sustained through blackouts in Pakistan with UPS systems, so that the fans, which are essential for hot summer days in villages in Pakistan, could keep on running.<sup>63</sup> Air conditioners are installed in Asba's house in Rawalpindi, where the electrical supply is very stable when compared to that in the villages. However, there are no air conditioners in most houses of informants in Pakistan because the electricity is too expensive.

Pakistani women also transform their bathrooms and kitchens in Pakistan to improve their living standard and show off their modernity to relatives. In my informants' new houses in Pakistan, the "tea buckets" are still found in their bathrooms but they either install squat toilets or sitting toilets with small showers next to them. The small shower is for cleaning and replacement of the teapot buckets. The design of these houses has similarities with houses or flats in Hong Kong. Kitchens in Bahria Town are installed with range hoods and ovens. An oven is a luxury for a small flat in Hong Kong but the kitchens of my informants' new houses in Pakistan have plenty of space for large ovens. In Hong Kong, the stoves are installed on the tables in the kitchen. However, most of the time in less-well-off families in villages in Pakistan, stoves are on the floor and wood is used as the fuel, rather than the natural gas. In this instance, Pakistani women improve their homes in Pakistan, which gives them higher quality of life and reflects their Hong Kong image, and hence their higher social status than their relatives in the villages.

My informants bring various household products to Pakistan so that they can use the same products they have in Hong Kong, ranging from shampoo to vacuum cleaners and so on. The use of the household products from Hong Kong has both the functions of showing off and also practical use, as they think that there are too many

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<sup>63</sup> The UPS system may not be strong enough to support all the electricity usage of a house. The UPS system of Adaza's house, for example, is not sufficient to supply electricity for the refrigerator and dining room.

counterfeit products in Pakistan. Above all, this also shows their Hongkongese identity to their relatives in Pakistan.

In short, home, in a physical sense, is largely supported by the consumption of electrical appliances and furniture in Pakistan, and “Pakistani-style” products in Hong Kong. Salih (2003), who studies the homes of Moroccan migrants in Italy, analyzes the relationship between consumption and homes. She writes:

Consumption emerges as a twofold practice. On the one hand, it serves the aim of operating a “distinction” and affirming a difference with respect to those who have remained in Morocco (Bourdieu 1984), and on the other hand it represents a complex process whereby women appropriate and negotiate symbols of modernity by interpreting and attributing value to goods that flow from Italy to Morocco and vice versa...In the case of Moroccan migrant women, Italy and Morocco supply different and complementary symbolic and material resources, equally crucial for the construction of self and home. (Salih 2003:69)

My informants strengthen their Pakistani identity with the “Pakistani-style” decoration in Hong Kong, and use the products from Hong Kong at their houses in Pakistan to differentiate themselves from their local Pakistani peers. In this way, they add meanings to their flats through the decoration and design.

On the one hand, these informants use certain “Pakistani products”, such as food and decorative materials in Hong Kong, to keep them connected to Pakistan. They hope that their homes in Hong Kong continue to be Islamic and under the protection of Allah, with the Islamic verses on their doors. They maintain their Pakistani ways of life in Hong Kong by watching Indian movies and music videos. However, they decorate their homes with “Hong Kong style” products such as dining tables. They also want a high standard of living in Pakistan, so they have bought or built middle-upper class houses, and equipped their newly built houses with UPS systems and sitting toilets. From their point of view, “improving the quality of life” means that one has to use high quality imported products; therefore, Pakistani



women bring their new lifestyles from Hong Kong to Pakistan. Moreover, some expect that they and their children will live in their houses in Pakistan for the long term in the future. They therefore claim that the quality of life has to be maintained in Pakistan, for fear that their children “cannot adapt to life in Pakistan”, although this may only be one of the reasons for building houses in the country.

The decoration of their physical homes in both Hong Kong and Pakistan has clear implications for what my informants think about homes: their physical homes, especially the ones in Pakistan, show that they have raised their social status after living in Hong Kong. In the next section, I will examine the cognitive homes of Pakistani women between Hong Kong and Pakistan.

### **Where is Home for Pakistani Women?**

My informants give diverse answers on their perception of homes. Some may love, miss or plan to go back to Pakistan, and see Pakistan as their roots. Others do not want to go back to Pakistan because they have spent most of their lives in Hong Kong. However, some spent most of their lives in Pakistan but are very clear that Hong Kong is their home because in order to pursue a better living standard, they have to migrate overseas, and there are limited opportunities to go back to Pakistan permanently. Therefore, there are multiple definitions of home; however, during my investigation, I found that the homes of most Pakistani women are related to the social relations (often family relations), in a certain place. The places or locations of homes and their identities both depend on where their close social relations are. Migrants give social meanings to their places of home where they have families and/or friends. Their homes are also sources of identity (Davidson 2008:246). In this section, I discuss 1) homes as places of prosperity and safety, 2) homes and identities,

3) homes and memories, 4) homes and families, and 5) homes and future planning.

### **Home as a Place of Prosperity and Safety**

Some Pakistani women treat Hong Kong as home because they hope for a safe environment and economic opportunities. Sabira said,

I can say Hong Kong is my home. I feel safer here than in my country. Here my children grow up for a long time. My children will spend most of their time in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is my motherland [She was born in Hong Kong but grew up in Pakistan]. Both Hong Kong and Pakistan are okay for me. We cannot cut our ancestors and our roots. We have to go back to Pakistan, not every year but we have to go back. Sometimes, I think that both are homes. If you count five is the full marks, Hong Kong has three and Pakistan has two marks. If you ask my children, I think that they give at least four marks to Hong Kong. They spend their whole life here. For myself, as a woman, I have to protect my children's future and safety. I would rather stay in Hong Kong and make this place my home.

Another reason for choosing Hong Kong over Pakistan is that there is more freedom in Hong Kong.

When I retire, I want to stay in Hong Kong. But I will go on vacation to Pakistan if I stay in Hong Kong. In Pakistan, you are restricted to your family or some area. You have some limitation. Like Ms X, she's traditional, but there are still things that she can do here but not in Pakistan. If the family culture does not allow it, you cannot do it. [In Pakistan, there are more restrictions?] Yes. You can say that. If you are retired, everybody expects you to stay at home. But in Hong Kong, you can do a lot of voluntary work and work outside the home. My father and mother are in Hong Kong. Why should I go back?

Sabira's husband prefers to live in Pakistan but Sabira thinks that it is not realistic to live there. They would not be able to enjoy the economic opportunities that they have in Hong Kong if they lived in Pakistan. In Hong Kong, most Pakistanis can make more money than they do in Pakistan but there is little time for relaxation. Sabira explained,

If you ask my husband, he would say that he likes to go back to Pakistan because he feels too tired to work in Hong Kong. Just work, work, work! No relaxation and no time for himself. He does not like Hong Kong. The life in Pakistan is relaxing. It's tension-free life because he would be a farmer if he



went back to Pakistan. 'I will go to the field.' He said. But he did not think that he needs to earn money [even though you have your own farmland in Pakistan]. Different people have different opinions. I am saying only for myself. I am not thinking about others when I say that I will stay in Hong Kong.

Later when I interviewed informally Sabira's husband, he said, "I don't like Hong Kong! I hate Hong Kong. Every year I must go back to Pakistan for 15 days and enjoy my life there....Hong Kong people are sad and work every day. There are no smiles on the people's faces. People are worried about this and that."

However, the different answers of Sabira and her husband showed that their gendered experiences vary in Hong Kong. Sabira works in Hong Kong and enjoys the freedom to go out freely. She enjoys more freedom than she would have had if she had stayed in Pakistan as a housewife. However, her husband works as a construction worker and is discriminated against and maltreated by his boss in Hong Kong. This may be because the image of Pakistani men seems to be more negative than Pakistani women in Hong Kong; Pakistani men are often seen as "criminals" or "illegal immigrants" in Hong Kong. Pakistani men also get stereotypical jobs such as construction and security work. Hence, Hong Kong Chinese also affect how the Pakistani women and their families make Hong Kong and Pakistan home (cf. Leung 2004:67). Sabira's husband felt sad about his life in Hong Kong because he was extremely busy and had to work very hard without much assistance, but he wanted to keep the whole family together in the same city, which gave him a sense of unity and love.

There are concerns for Pakistani women if they go back to live in Pakistan. Sabira talked about the safety in Pakistan. She noted,

I will only go back to Pakistan with a lot of money because if I have money, I will have a comfortable lifestyle and I can do what I want to do. Pakistanis come to Hong Kong for money. Nobody comes to stay in Hong Kong for enjoyment. When they have their children born in Hong Kong, they have to

stay here but they cannot stay here without money. I am not saying that you have to be very rich but you have to save some money for yourself and your children. For myself, simply, I don't want my children to die in a bomb blast. My children are the first priority in my life.

Education and opportunities to climb the social ladder are also factors which make Sabira wish to stay in Hong Kong. She further elaborated,

In Hong Kong, if my children get a good education level, they can pursue any ways of life they want. One day, they can join any stream of professions but if you don't have any connections in Pakistan, you have to pay a lot of money to let them climb the social ladder. Our children would not get good jobs in Pakistan if they lived there. Here, everybody has equal rights.

Economic opportunities and safety are the first priorities for Pakistani women, who have children in Hong Kong because they want to give their children the best environment for growing up. Pakistan is also a comparatively less secure society for Pakistani women, who are not an influential group in Pakistan. They need a society where there is political stability and economic prosperity for long-term settlement. However, for Pakistani men who are going to retire, Hong Kong is no longer the place for them to make a living. If their friends move back to Pakistan for retirement, they may also move back to Pakistan with their wives, leaving their adult children in Hong Kong (or perhaps reuniting with their children in Pakistan). As the cost of living in Pakistan is much lower than that in Hong Kong, one of my informants left for Pakistan because her husband retired. In other cases, for example, Asba's father is very influential in the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. He chose to stay in Hong Kong with his three adult children. His wife, Parwin, stays in Hong Kong for a few months every year. For Sabira's husband, living in Hong Kong makes him sad because he longs for the rural and relaxing life in Pakistan. He feels that he is more respected when he is in Pakistan, where he is not discriminated against. Still, the children's education and marriage is of the first priority for many families. Sabira's husband also wants the whole family to stay in the same city. Permanently returning



home requires negotiation and discussion between husbands and wives, unless the husbands are very authoritative.

### Homes and Identities

When migrants travel physically and mentally between various homes or different geographical scales and distances, their diasporic identities are transforming.

Leung (2003:253) suggests,

As those in diaspora sojourn physically and/or mentally between their new homes and *laojia* [old home in Chinese], diasporic individuals incorporate and blend experiences of multiple places and various homes to help make sense of their physical and social environments. These multi-placed experiences partially inform migrants' identities – who they are, where they belong, as well as how “Others” view who they are and where they belong – which in turn shape their adaptation strategies and further mobility patterns.

Some transnational Pakistani women in Hong Kong, who have “experiences of multiple places and various homes”, would like to see themselves as Pakistanis living in Hong Kong (cf. Leung 2003). These experiences include social inclusion, security, social mobility, and the possibility of keeping their own ways of life, and identities. These factors may shape the sense of belonging of Pakistani women. For example, after living in Hong Kong for 14 years, Sabira wants to keep her children's Pakistani identity while living in Hong Kong. She said,

I told my children that they have to love their culture. They are not Chinese. I don't want them to be in the middle. I don't want them to ask, “Who am I?” Some teenagers in Hong Kong adapt Chinese culture. They are neither Pakistanis nor Chinese. When they are in Chinese community, they are the outsiders. It is better to connect strongly with Pakistani culture. If you work and you have to wear uniforms, it is also okay that you do not wear Pakistani clothes. But mentally you know who you are.

From this quote, we understand that there are no conflicts for some Pakistani women who make Hong Kong their home and keep their Pakistani identity. However, they are concerned about the social exclusion by Hong Kong Chinese. Even though they make Hong Kong their home, they are not seen as “locals” and are not accepted

widely by Hong Kong Chinese. They have to defend their culture and religion when discrimination and misunderstanding arise. Such social exclusion affects Pakistani women's construction of home in Hong Kong. This echoes Brah's (1996:192) argument: "The question of 'home'...is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'." When Pakistani women want to make Hong Kong their home, they also have to make sure that their children have a very strong sense of Pakistani identity and live happily in Hong Kong without losing their Pakistani roots. They can have a home in Hong Kong as long as that is not where their hearts are.

Jannat experienced rejection by Hong Kong Chinese socially and economically. She said,

Hong Kong Chinese discriminate against us and think that we are lower class and inferior. They dislike us, whereas we Pakistanis discriminate against mainland Chinese....One Chinese woman in the market even asked if we had apples and oranges in Pakistan. She thought that our country was very poor and had no food for our people. She thought that we were poor so that we had to come to Hong Kong to make money. Hong Kong Chinese do not want us [Pakistanis] to share the same city with them.

What Jannat said seems to match what my other Chinese female friends said about their impression of South Asians. A Chinese woman in her early fifties told me how she thought about South Asians and other ethnic minorities in Hong Kong:

I think I racially discriminate against Indians, Pakistanis and Africans. India and Pakistan are developing countries and people are poor there. They have low educational level and are less civilized than we Chinese. As they are poor, they do not have money to receive education. They do not have the reasoning ability so when they have problems, they resort to violence. They are more violent than us.

Pakistanis working in Shamshuipo have strong build.<sup>64</sup> I am afraid of them. Their sweat makes them smell a lot. Pakistani women wear clothes

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<sup>64</sup> Shamshuipo is an old urban area in Kowloon where a number of immigrants live and work.



with strange colors. For example, the green color they like is strange, it is not the kind of color we like.

I mix Indians and Pakistanis. How can you tell the difference among them? Now people call them "South Asians". I do not know how to distinguish who are Nepalese, Pakistanis and Indians.

As Leung (2004:67) suggests, the senses of belonging and home are subjective and personal experiences for the migrants. These feelings should be understood within the contexts of cultural, economic, political and social circumstances. It is only through these perspectives that the position and actions of the migrants can be understood. While some Pakistani women and their family members feel safe enough to make homes in Hong Kong, they are rejected socially and economically by Hong Kong Chinese. Their sense of belonging and identity therefore vary individually, like Sabira who feels more comfortable living in Hong Kong than her husband. The identities of Pakistani women are therefore made and remade, produced and reproduced after they experience living in Hong Kong.

In short, although there are a number of benefits of living in Hong Kong over Pakistan, Pakistani women settling in Hong Kong are worried that their children will lose their roots or cannot be accepted by the Pakistani and/or Chinese community. Pakistani women and their children may gradually change their sense of home and identity as they continue to be connected to their relatives in Pakistan and experience cultural exclusion or inclusion in Hong Kong.

### **Homes and Memories**

Asba has just come to Hong Kong for two years but has regarded Hong Kong rather than Pakistan, where she has lived for 23 years, as home because she thinks that long-term settlement in Pakistan is an illusion. Nevertheless, she would prefer to go to the United Kingdom or the United States for a better future. This is how she explained the illusion of settling in one place. She said,



I saw a drama from the United Kingdom. The man in the drama said, "When I am old, I will go back." This is the same for my father. He always says, 'I will buy a tractor and do morning walks in the fields. I will make a farm and raise chickens. I will bring milk and butter to the city for your mom.' But he never does it. There is a home where they are brought up. I can feel it. When I am old, this thing won't be the same. I don't feel happy to go back. Maybe I have gotten used to the environment in Hong Kong. We will not go back to Pakistan to settle anymore. My home is in Hong Kong although my roots are there in Pakistan. My childhood memory is very precious. But I never think that Pakistan is my home. Sometimes I go back in the summer to Pakistan. I think that I may go to the United Kingdom or the United States. I feel that my people are suffering when I go back but I am not that good to go back and help the people there. It is not possible to go back anymore. Home is where you prefer to live. My personal life is in Hong Kong although I really fancy it – going back to Pakistan. In reality it is not my home anymore.

A few of my informants see both Hong Kong and Pakistan as their homes.

Only Asba's father and Adaza want to retire in Pakistan when they are old. This may also be an imagined or idealized form of living for Pakistanis because going back to live in Pakistan brings them a relaxed rural lifestyle, but it also implies separating from their children in Hong Kong and adaptation to rural life in Pakistan again.

Adaza said,

I have two homes. One is here in Hong Kong and one is in Pakistan. I still miss my life in Fanling when I was small in Hong Kong. I sometimes go back there and see the area I lived. I want to go inside the building I used to live. But it is a private area; I cannot go back and see my flat anymore. When I went back to Pakistan when I was 11 years old, I cried every day. I did not like Pakistan....I wanted the life I had in Fanling....When I stayed in Pakistan for a longer time, I was okay with it. When I am in Hong Kong, I miss Pakistan. Now I want to live in my new house in Pakistan. I will live there when I am old....I will go back to Pakistan.<sup>65</sup> I will live in the village with my husband and buy a flat in Wah Cantt [the nearby city] and then rent it out. My children will have their own lives. I cannot be with them all my life.

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<sup>65</sup> In Britain, it seems that at first few Pakistanis who migrated to Britain wanted to stay in the United Kingdom permanently (Ballard 2009:29). "However long they might have worked in Britain, they expected that they would eventually go home to enjoy the fruits of their labour – and now that an increasing number of settlers are reaching retirement age, some are doing just that." (Ballard 2009:29) Some returned to Pakistan after they sold their house in Britain. They thought that there would be some kinds of business opportunities in Pakistan but few have lived their dreams of making money in their rural hometowns.



Adaza applied for citizenship in the United Kingdom. This is relevant to her views of home. Even though her application was approved, she does not seem to be planning to bring her children to the United Kingdom. This is evident by the fact that her children only have Hong Kong SAR passports, but not British passports. She would have to weigh the costs and benefits of whether to move back to Pakistan or to go to the United Kingdom. In fact, it is a contradictory action. If she planned to go back to Pakistan one day, why would she need British citizenship? This application cost her HKD28,000 in total for four people in her family.<sup>66</sup> Thus, perhaps when Adaza applied for British citizenship, she may be preparing for a chance to reunite with her two brothers in the United Kingdom one day. This citizenship may also grant her welfare benefits in the future and freedom of travel. This may also grant her a better living environment and economic opportunities for her own children (cf. Leung 2004:67).<sup>67</sup>

Going back or returning to their home countries is not always preferred by migrants, especially Pakistani women in Hong Kong. This is because going back permanently is not a “simple decision nor a given for people in diaspora” (Leung 2004:66). Adaza “makes home en route” because she is on the road to migrate to Great Britain or go back to Pakistan after retirement, but she tries her best to make herself comfortable when she faces all these changes in her life – as I will discuss next chapter (cf. Leung 2004:66).

When migrants talked about their home emotionally, they referred to their

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<sup>66</sup> The other younger children do not hold BN(O) passports and therefore cannot apply for British passports.

<sup>67</sup> Holding British passports seems to make Adaza, her husband, and her children free to travel to England and live there permanently. This makes them “functional transnational beings” that Leung mentioned (2004:65). However, permanent residency is more important than the freedom granted for them to travel between countries because having a BN(O) already allowed Adaza to travel to the United Kingdom without a visa application.

family members in Pakistan or the United Kingdom, and hence recalled their memories. Their perceptions of homes are shaped both by memories and by ongoing interactions with their family members. Their memories of Pakistan shape the “perceptions and images of home, direct performances of belonging” and “connect the migrant across the expanse of time and space, giving meaning to the experiences of everyday life” (Davidson 2008:30). Therefore, there is no single, stable home. This is because their memories and experiences change gradually. Similarly, their identities also change as their experiences change, although the pace of changing of homes and identities may be different.

### **Home and Families**

Home is “a conceptual space of identification” and also “a nodal point in social relations” (Olwig 1998:236). To Adaza, Hong Kong, Pakistan and Britain are all spaces of identification and focal points of family relations. Her home may be in the United Kingdom one day because two of her brothers live in Great Britain, and one brother and one sister live in Hong Kong. Mariam, 22, as the child of Hong Kong Pakistanis, also sees her home in relation to where her family members are. She said, “My home is in Hong Kong, my father, mother, sister and brother are all in Hong Kong. If I went back to Pakistan, I would have to stay with my in-laws but they don’t treat me well.” There is no incentive for her to go back to Pakistan at present, although she grew up there.

However, some consider Hong Kong home and stay in Hong Kong not because of their parents, but for their children. Sabira explained,

Now if somebody says my parents are in Hong Kong and therefore I stay in Hong Kong, it may not be true! They don’t know how often I meet with my parents. But I still like to stay here for my children. If I say I go home, I go to KC [the housing estate name]. When I was in Pakistan, I say that I have to go home. Where? It is Hong Kong! KC! Even if I am in Pakistan, I have to go



back home. I have children and family....No one cooks for them if I am away!

Although Sabira employs a part-time Indonesian maid, she considers Hong Kong as her home because she thinks that her major role is as a housewife and caretaker of her children, who grow up and live in the territory. Likewise, Jannat thinks that home means to be with her family. She is married with two children and now sees Hong Kong as her home forever, although she also thinks of Islamabad or Hassanabdal as homes because she has properties there. She said,

My home is now in Hong Kong...forever. My children study and work in Hong Kong. But I will go back to Pakistan with Zafar [her husband] and live there. Pakistan is my country. My people are like this. When the children grow up, we will go back. My husband thinks that if the children can study here until primary school, then we can go back. But I think that they should study in Hong Kong. When the children are in Form 1 to Form 2, they become naughty. Before I thought that we should go back to Pakistan. I thought and thought about Pakistan. But when I start working, I like to stay in Hong Kong. Now my life is busy....I don't have time to think anymore. So I just want to make money...and my children need to study in Hong Kong. When they are old enough to work and get married, we will go back. My family is home. No family, no home. If I were alone in Pakistan and have no family, I do not have home. One person is not okay. In Pakistani saying, *ek akela doh giyarah*, two people mean eleven people!

When my informants, like Jannat and Adaza, were asked where they made their home, they would explain what they have experienced and how they plan their future. Hence, we can see that the past and future are all connected together in creating a concept of home.

### **Homes and Future Planning**

We have examined that the concept of home in relation to one's memories, and whether one wants to unite with family members, as well as what plans lie ahead after retirement or when one is old. In this section we can see how all these factors: family, memories and future plans affect a Pakistani woman's sense of home.

Bisharrat, 27, has been thinking about where she will settle down one day.



She said, "I miss home. I miss my younger brother. But in the last four years, I didn't want to live in Pakistan...At home in Pakistan, I had a lot of activities. I had a lot of recipes for cooking. I was a fashion designer. I tutored my younger sister; I did shopping for my sister. I miss my family."

Bisharrat does not know where to go next, which means that she does not know where her home will be in the future. Currently, Bisharrat lives alone in Hong Kong without any relatives to take care of her. She may go back to Pakistan next year, although it is still uncertain. She may get married to a Pakistani man who works in Japan – so where is her home? It can be in Pakistan, Hong Kong or somewhere else. The point of going to Hong Kong was to assert her rights as a Hong Kong permanent resident and to make money. She does not treat Hong Kong as her home, but rather as a place for making money and standing on her own feet. She does not want to live in Pakistan permanently so she searches for a new life and new home. Nevertheless, she has very good memories of Pakistan: she cooked for her family, decorated her house and shared happy moments with her siblings. In short, when she struggles to make her home in Hong Kong, she misses her home in Pakistan:

First, "home sweet home" – if you come home, and you relax, then it is your home.<sup>68</sup> Home is your place where your parents and brothers and sisters are and you enjoy with them. You talk to them and share everything....But I am still struggling now....I am in the present, I don't know what my future is. I miss my home a lot. I miss everything because of my family and my brothers....But if you have your own home, you can relax. Before I lived with my relatives but they did not treat me well, I could not relax in Hong Kong. But now I moved out from my relatives and rented a small flat. By now, you can say: "home sweet home". This is my present stage. I don't think that I look forward to my home in the future. I'm still struggling and I will see what happens. I'm now trying my best to plan the future....Everybody is trying their best. Second, my parents moved to Hong Kong but they come from Pakistan....They came to Hong Kong and struggled here. We [Bisharrat and her siblings] were born here. How can we go to other countries and not miss them anymore? We were born here but we still have to go back to meet them.

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<sup>68</sup> Here, the home may also mean the physical home. However, her elaboration is more toward her cognitive home and her family. That is why home is so important – it is the summation of many different issues: one's family relations, cultural roots and life experiences.



Pakistan is my home. Hong Kong is also my home.

Saying that "I am struggling", Bisharrat has difficulty in envisioning her future home. Moreover, she emphasized that as a single woman she would get married and have her new home with her husband. She also equates home with her parents' experiences in Hong Kong. Therefore, it seems that Pakistani women "must somehow deal with homes that are also credible to others" (Olwig 1998:231). This means that home is defined by the individual and her relationship with her family members and future partners.

In conclusion, memories, families and future planning are all interlinked in affecting Pakistani women's views of where home is: for example, Adaza's memory in Pakistan connects her to her ideal retired life in Pakistan, even though her memory of time with family members in Fanling also makes her attached to Hong Kong. Jannat has her home in Hong Kong today, but she also bought land and property in Pakistan. These decisions were initiated by her memories of Pakistan and knowledge of her hometown. Adaza and Jannat have two homes: one in Hong Kong and one in Pakistan. Bisharrat's natal family members are all in Pakistan, which makes her attached to Pakistan. Some Pakistani women, such as Sabira, Jannat and Asba, want to have a chance to climb the social class ladder in Hong Kong. They stay in Hong Kong in the hope of a better future because it is a safe and economically developed place in comparison to Pakistan. Some of my informants are still in transition. Bisharrat showed vividly how her feelings about home were affected by different factors – family relations, economic opportunities, memories, expectations for quality of life and her future marriage. Many Pakistani women are thus between homes: some see Hong Kong as home but some do not. Others know that they belong to neither Hong Kong nor Pakistan because homes are affected by their

memories or future plans.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the idea of home according to two different concepts – physical and cognitive. In terms of physical home, Pakistani women make their flats in Hong Kong suitable for their way of life and add elements that bring comfort and modernity. They consume new electrical appliances to raise their quality of life and use dining tables to show their adaptation to life in Hong Kong. Sometimes, they transport Pakistani goods such as carpets, even though they are very heavy to carry, to decorate their homes and make them feel as if they are living in Pakistan. Most informants enjoy the Pakistani lifestyle by watching their favorite Bollywood-style television programmes. Kitchen utensils and some food products are also brought from Pakistan, which also gives them feelings of living in Pakistan. Their physical homes in both Hong Kong and Pakistan not only reflect their ways of life, but also reflect their hopes of keeping their traditions and religion as Pakistani women. Indeed, there is a question of whether such decorations and way of life can actually keep their traditions and religion. Does it help them keep their religious faith when their television programs mainly revolve around Hindu beliefs?

Their identities are revealed in how they make their homes in Hong Kong and Pakistan because their physical homes contain elements from both Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistani households. On one hand, they made their homes in Pakistan somewhat similar to their homes in Hong Kong so that they feel “comfortable” when they go back to Pakistan for short-term visits. On the other hand, they keep traditions of Pakistan in their small flats in Hong Kong. They want to keep the best parts of both places when they live in either Pakistan or Hong Kong. No matter how they



design them, their physical homes must contain elements from both Hong Kong and Pakistan. They cannot switch back to the lifestyle they had in Pakistan after living in Hong Kong, so the design of their houses and flats in both Hong Kong and Pakistan, reveal their state of liminality, that is, between two idealized homes.

When you ask where a Pakistani comes from, he or she would say Pakistan or a hometown's name. It is often where they feel they belong to, that is their identity. In Pakistan, some of my informants and their husbands build new houses in villages or cities, which are not for showing off their cosmopolitan image, but are processes of home-making and reconfirming their identities and roots in Pakistan. Thus, when "home" is discussed in a physical sense, it cannot take away its connection with migrants' emotions and hence identity.

Their willingness and ability in building the houses are often determined by economic opportunities, the stability of society, family members, memories and social inclusion/exclusion in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. With these factors, their views and plans of constructing home gradually change as some Pakistani women struggle with their memories, present lives and plans for their future. If they plan to settle permanently in Hong Kong, their plans to construct, renovate or purchase houses in Pakistan will be affected. Their cognitive home affects their making of physical home and their physical home reflects their cognitive sense of home and identity. This chapter has examined perceptions of home and its relation to identities. To elaborate, I will further discuss the senses of identity next chapter. This will contribute to a better understanding of how Pakistani women shift their identities between two homes.

## Chapter 7

### Senses of Identity: Going Home, Dress and Investment

#### Introduction

The last chapter explored the physical and cognitive homes of Pakistani women in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. When these women mention “home”, they inevitably touch upon their return trips to Pakistan. Going to Pakistan for visits is often a highlight of that particular year because it involves saving for a long time. When they go back to Pakistan, they participate in a number of functions and activities, and shift their identities. As they perform their identities, they are closely observed by the elderly, in-laws, neighbors and children. In this chapter, I examine why and how Pakistani women shift their identities in Hong Kong and Pakistan, based on the previous description of the lives of Pakistani women (see Chapters 3-5).

This chapter shows how Pakistani women use their dress and investment to shift their identities in front of their relatives in Pakistan, which I call performances. The term “performance” refers to “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (Goffman 1959:22). Through these performances, Pakistani women can make use of their lives in Hong Kong and Pakistan to shift between “Pakistani” and “Hongkongese” identities.

Some Pakistani women are keen to show off their Hongkongese image when they go back to Pakistan by dressing up. Others are careful to protect their filial and religious daughter-in-law image and downplay their cosmopolitan image by not



wearing any make-up. Apart from dress, some informants invest in property and send money back home, which raises their class and social position (Basch et al 1993:361). They buy or build houses so that they can improve the living standards of their relatives and themselves. However, my informants' ability to buy new houses implies a great financial disparity and social status gap between my informants and their relatives in Pakistan. My informants' relatives in Pakistan are usually worse-off than my informants. I examine the reasons why my informants can shift their identities through dress and investment below.

### **Reasons for their Abilities to Shift Identities**

There are a number of reasons why Pakistani women are able to shift their identities. First, the image of Hong Kong in the eyes of the Pakistanis who live in Pakistan is that it is prosperous and cosmopolitan. The Pakistani relatives of my informants living in Pakistan expect my informants to act in a cosmopolitan way. Second, Hong Kong Pakistani women are usually middle-class in Pakistan but they are lower-class in Hong Kong. The class difference makes Pakistani women shift their social status in these two places. Third, Pakistani women who live in Hong Kong have gained knowledge, and experience overseas and seem more sophisticated than their counterparts in Pakistan. Below, I will explain these three reasons one by one with examples from the three key informants whom I went with to Pakistan.

First, Hong Kong and Pakistan differ significantly: Hong Kong provides a relatively safe and stable living environment equipped with welfare services compared to politically unstable Pakistan. Whereas in Pakistan the economy is stagnant, there is a war with the Taliban and also widespread unemployment. Hong Kong on the other hand is an attractive city with advanced technology, a corruption-

free government and flourishing economy. This is a deep-rooted image in the minds of Pakistanis in Pakistan and therefore largely contributes to the changing performances of Hong Kong Pakistani women.

Second, as I discussed in Chapter 3, Pakistani women have acquired two very different social statuses because of the difference in living standards between Hong Kong and Pakistan. The standard of living in Hong Kong is much higher than that of Pakistan, so the monthly salaries in Hong Kong can be as much as ten times that of their equivalent in Pakistan. If Pakistanis are able to save enough money before their return, they can assume middle-class lives in Pakistan. For example, Jannat, as a dishwasher, is lower-class in Hong Kong and lives in a public housing estate. She has to work because her husband only earns around HKD10,000 a month, which is not sufficient to cover all the household expenses. The school bus fare for her elder son costs HKD800 a month. Therefore, she has to work in order to save some money to pay for the air tickets to Pakistan, in addition to supporting her family finances in Hong Kong.

Even though Jannat only earns HKD3000 (around USD370) a month, she can show her cosmopolitan image as a middle-class Pakistani overseas when she goes back to Pakistan.<sup>69</sup> One of Jannat's brothers works as a telephone operator and earns PKR11,000 a month (around USD136).<sup>70</sup> Although Jannat only works part time in Hong Kong, she earns three times more than her brother does in Pakistan. This is because the living standard in Hong Kong is much higher than that in Pakistan and

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<sup>69</sup> Cosmopolitans "are multilingual gourmet tasters who travel among global cultures, savouring cultural differences as they flit with consummate ease between social worlds" (Werbner 1997:11-12). However, this definition does not really fit the case of Pakistani women. Pakistani women present their "cosmopolitan image" but it does not mean that they are cosmopolitans who have such ease in the globe nor do they act and think in a global way.

<sup>70</sup> Jannat's brother's salary is higher than the annual per capita income in Pakistan. The annual per capita income in Pakistan is USD1065 in year 2007-2008 (Pakistan Basic Facts 2008).



the Hong Kong dollar is a stronger currency than the Pakistani rupee. Thus, Jannat can afford mid-range restaurants or clothes in Pakistan. She spent one month's salary on shopping when she went back to Pakistan. She bought a house in Bahria Town in Islamabad, which is a marker of middle-class social status. If she had not migrated to Hong Kong, and worked, she would never have saved enough money for her to invest in this property.

Jannat is different from other Pakistani women, as most Pakistani women do not work. However, Adaza, who does not work, also has very low social status in Hong Kong and middle-class status in Pakistan. Adaza leads a very humble life in Hong Kong because she has six children who are still in school and her husband earns around HKD20,000 a month. In spite of the low socio-economic status in Hong Kong, her social image in Pakistan improved after she lived in Hong Kong for a few years. As she helped her husband to migrate to Hong Kong, and supports him as a good wife, her husband praised her in front of other relatives when he went back to Pakistan. Without her Hong Kong permanent residency status, her husband would not have been able to migrate to Hong Kong and work to support his family, including paying for his nieces' dowry, and building a new house. Thus, Adaza is proud that her contribution to the family is sufficient for her to have a better image in front of her sisters and brothers-in-law, even though she is not making a financial contribution. Adaza also claimed that her husband consulted her opinions when he needed to make medium-sized to big financial decisions, such as building a house and buying electronics and furniture. Adaza also discussed with her husband the preparations for the future dowry of their daughters, such as buying gold when the price of gold is low. Adaza and her husband seem to have a rather egalitarian relationship and make many major financial and family decisions together. This is

because when Adaza and her husband live in Hong Kong, her husband treats Adaza as his partner in life.

Adaza considers herself middle class in Pakistan, but the lowest of all classes in Hong Kong; as she said, "My husband helped his family to become middle class from lower class in Pakistan. We bought a van for them so that they can use it to earn some money by taking patients to the hospital. We built a house for them. We paid for the dowry for his brother's daughters." Obviously, when Adaza used "we", she counted her own contribution when her husband supports his family financially. Adaza was not satisfied with the continual demand for financial support from the relatives of her husband's side. Initially, Adaza supported her husband and considered this a good thing for the parents-in-law. However, Adaza is more concerned about how the money is spent because her husband has supported her in-laws for so many years at the expense of her and her children's living quality. She complained that her in-laws do not understand how hard her husband works in Hong Kong for their benefit. She could not stop her husband but was obviously unhappy about this continuous financial support.

During her visit to Pakistan, Adaza "inspected" the dowry her niece has received. "My husband paid for it. I have to know how the money was spent...Her father [the eldest brother of her husband] only earns PKR5000 or PKR6000 a month. How can he afford the dowry?" She said this in Cantonese in front of her Pakistani relatives. While Adaza's husband helps his in-laws financially, Adaza's nuclear family is not in a good financial situation in Hong Kong. Her husband was hurt at work and therefore could not work for a few months. Given her very tough life in Hong Kong, it is unsurprising that she is anxious about how the money was spent. In recent years, her husband has also agreed that she should guard their new house and



stop supporting the joint family. She was given the power to decide if they should guard their financial interests. This is a quiet revolution against the joint family system.

Thus, Adaza's social status is enhanced in the eyes of her in-laws because her husband has improved the economic situation of both her nuclear family and the whole joint family by working in Hong Kong. However, she feels financially exploited by her in-laws in Pakistan, even after she has been in Hong Kong for five years.<sup>71</sup> As Ballard writes (1990: 234),

Migrants, for example, often felt that while those who stayed at home reaped an immediate benefit from their remittances, they often failed to appreciate how much hardship had been faced in generating them. And although sending money home gave migrants great satisfaction, most also felt that they should, given their greatly enhanced contribution to the group's collective resources, have a larger voice in family affairs, despite their youth and formal juniority.

Pakistani women who migrated to Hong Kong and improved their social status in Pakistan face gossip or jealousy from their relatives who remain in Pakistan. Jamila exclaimed, "What would the relatives think when you can buy a middle-class house there, but they cannot?" This is true, but Jannat's brother-in-law is also able to buy a middle-class house in Rawalpindi without working overseas. Jannat's brother-in-law advises and encourages her to do more investment.

Jannat and Adaza are both married women, who have accumulated certain capital with their husbands' savings in Hong Kong, whereas Asba is a young unmarried postgraduate student and it seems impossible for her to be "higher-class" in Pakistan. She still holds a middle-class status in Pakistan because of her father, who works in Hong Kong and sends remittances to her mother living in Pakistan.

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<sup>71</sup> As mentioned in previous chapters, Adaza's father was a Hong Kong policeman and Adaza was born and holds permanent residency in Hong Kong. Therefore, her husband was able to move to Hong Kong easily through marriage before 1997.

Asba is from a landowning family, as her parents have properties in the city and the village. In Hong Kong, however, she is a tenant and lives in a tiny flat rented in Jordan. When she tried to settle down in Hong Kong two years ago, she and her father shared one rented room only. She also refused to let her friends visit her home in Hong Kong.<sup>72</sup>

Third, Hong Kong Pakistani women have experienced life overseas and because of this, they are able to accumulate social and cultural capital. This is done through financial support such as remittances, and the provision of networking or migration advice to their relatives in Pakistan (Werbner 2002:65). These Pakistanis are able to capitalize on their knowledge of Hong Kong and experiences of migration, which in effect gives them their higher social status and hence shifts their identities.

When Jannat went back to Pakistan, Jannat's neighbors and relatives came to visit her knowing that she came back from Hong Kong. They asked about the size of Hong Kong, the transportation system as well as Chinese "culture" and language. Jannat shared the "Bing Hung Cha" [a popular bottled red tea in Hong Kong] with her sister and sisters-in-law. None of them liked it; they all felt that it was a strange tea. This kind of drink was foreign to her relatives; but as Jannat consumed the tea, she presented her Hong Kong image that she was more sophisticated and used to "foreign culture" than her relatives.

Adaza lived in Hong Kong during her childhood because her father was recruited to work for the Hong Kong Police Force in the 1950s as we have seen in Chapter 2. Adaza has always been proud of her family background and her father's

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<sup>72</sup> Not all Pakistani women are lower-class in Hong Kong and middle-class in Pakistan. There are two informants who perceive themselves as middle class in Hong Kong and upper class in Pakistan. For example, Abida, as a Syed (a good caste), has two maids in her mother's home. Her husband has a servant over 45 years old, who grew up in his family in Pakistan. In Hong Kong, she has no maids and has to work as an office assistant in a school. She could afford to send her daughter to playgroup which costs HKD1500 a month, and later it would cost HKD3000 a month with extra lessons. This amount would not be affordable for many Pakistani women who live in the same public housing estate.



experience and contribution to Hong Kong. She speaks fluent Cantonese and knows a lot more about Hong Kong than her relatives. Young people seek her advice if they want to go to Hong Kong to work.

Indeed, the opportunity to work and study in Hong Kong gives some Pakistani women higher social status back home, especially in the cases of Jannat and Asba. As a working woman, Jannat, who can speak both English and Cantonese, seems to be more capable than the other female relatives. She is the only woman in her family who went overseas. She works outside the home in Hong Kong, whereas her sisters-in-law stay at home mostly or work in the parlor at home in Pakistan. Jannat once said, "I don't like staying at home and talk, talk, talk. I like to be busy and work, so I can earn a living." Similarly, Asba has the chance to study for a masters' degree in Hong Kong and work as a teacher. She went to Australia for an English immersion course through her masters program. She was seen as "flying to the moon" as mentioned by her relatives, which means getting a higher social status and better economic situation by moving to Hong Kong. Unlike most other Pakistani women, she will have a middle-class life in Hong Kong.

Most of my informants are middle-class in Pakistan because of their experience in Hong Kong which has made them seem cosmopolitan, the remittances they sent to Pakistan from Hong Kong, their knowledge about Hong Kong, and/or their family background and connection with Hong Kong. Their lives in Hong Kong affect their social status in Pakistan. The transnational transfer of wealth gives them higher social status in Pakistan, comforts them psychologically, and allows them to manipulate their identities in Pakistan. Pakistani women shift their identities in various ways: I will now discuss how they shift their identities through dress, and then investment.

## Changing Physical Appearance through Dress

Various scholars show that dress is a useful lens for understanding social status, cultural exclusion and identity. Pakistani women change their “appearance” and tell the audience of their “social statuses” through dress (Goffman 1959:24). Pakistani women going to Pakistan change their dress so that they can present their “middle-class self” in front of the audience, who are their relatives. “Dress identifies the wearer’s community to other groups and communities, and may also reflect the other’s status” (Ku 2006:291). Plüss (2006) notes how multi-ethnic Muslims in Hong Kong may make use of their characteristics, such as clothes, to assimilate with the majority Muslim groups. In this section, I examine Jannat, Adaza and Asba’s trips back to Pakistan and how they use their dress and accessories to demonstrate their cosmopolitan image. Their audiences vary: Jannat’s audiences are her mother, brothers and sisters-in-law, while Adaza’s targets are her in-laws and old neighbors; Asba has to deal with her old classmates and relatives. While all Pakistani women perform in dress, not all of them have the same degree of extravagance, and not all of them think the same way about showing off their overseas image. My three informants changed their image differently when they went back to Pakistan.

### Going to Pakistan and Keeping Good Image

When I followed Jannat back to Pakistan, Jannat wore what I consider, “Western-style” clothes: for instance, a dark green turtle neck long-sleeve vest with a pair of blue jeans and a black scarf. She had straightened her hair before her departure and did not use the scarf for *hijab* (veil) so that her hair would not be curved. She still did not wear a *hijab* even when she arrived at Rawalpindi Airport (Figure 7.1). When she reached her sister’s home, her sister was taken aback by her new mobile phone



adorned with sparkling beads, and a teddy bear key ring was attached to her white handbag. The use of teddy bears as accessories seemed to be possibly inappropriate for Muslims because an informant said that there should not be any portraits or dolls or living beings around when they pray. As one can easily see, there are clearly some differences in the style of Jannat's dress in comparison to her relatives at home.

During the flight to Islamabad, I asked Jannat how she felt about her Western clothes. She replied, "I am worried that they [her family in Pakistan] would not like me wearing these clothes....If they asked, 'why do you dress like this?', I would say, You, Fun Hang, asked me to wear like this!" Before she moved to Hong Kong, she did not wear any Western clothes because she understands that, in Pakistan, women's dress codes are closely observed. So on this trip to Pakistan, she challenged the moral standard by dressing differently for the first time in front of her relatives. Jannat had a good reason to wear Western clothes, as I also wore Western clothes when we went to Pakistan together. As I accompanied her in Western clothes, she might have felt comfortable and confident wearing Western clothes as well.



Figure 7.1: Jannat wore jeans and straightened her hair for her trip to Pakistan but some Pakistani women I interviewed would not wear Western clothes in front of their relatives for fear of criticism.

In contrast to Jannat, Adaza has not worn any Western dress since she was 12 years old. Adaza wore her nicest *shalwar kameez* when she flew to Pakistan. It was also her first time wearing this blue *shalwar kameez*. She explained, "My brother brought the cloths from the United Kingdom. It costs me HKD90 to make it into *shalwar kameez*." As Adaza is a very thrifty person, I was surprised to hear that she used HKD90 to make her new clothes in Hong Kong. She can make the clothes for less than half the price in Pakistan. But in order to wear this *shalwar kameez* to Pakistan, she had to ask a tailor to make the clothes for her even if it meant that she had to pay extra for it. The embroidery and the quality of the *shalwar kameez* tell everyone that it is a good piece of clothing. However, Adaza only wore it on the first day she arrived in Pakistan because it is too hot to wear this thick *shalwar kameez* in summer.

Adaza wore *abbaya* when she went back to Pakistan from Hong Kong (Figure 7.2).<sup>73</sup> However, when she stayed in her village in Pakistan, she simply wore a big shawl to cover herself to blend in with local Pakistanis. She did not have to wear *abbaya*, which covered more of her body than a shawl. No matter how religious and traditional Adaza seems to be, she admitted that she could dress differently in Pakistan with a different color shawl to distinguish herself from other villagers. She explained, "When I go to Pakistan, I have the freedom to choose what to wear because I am from Hong Kong." She feels more relaxed because she has such freedom to choose what to wear but she veiled her face whenever she left her in-laws' house in Pakistan. Still she considers herself "liberated" when she is in Pakistan because she identifies herself as a Pakistani living in Hong Kong.

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<sup>73</sup> She also wears the *abbaya* all the time when she goes out in Hong Kong, even if it is just to go to the supermarket.



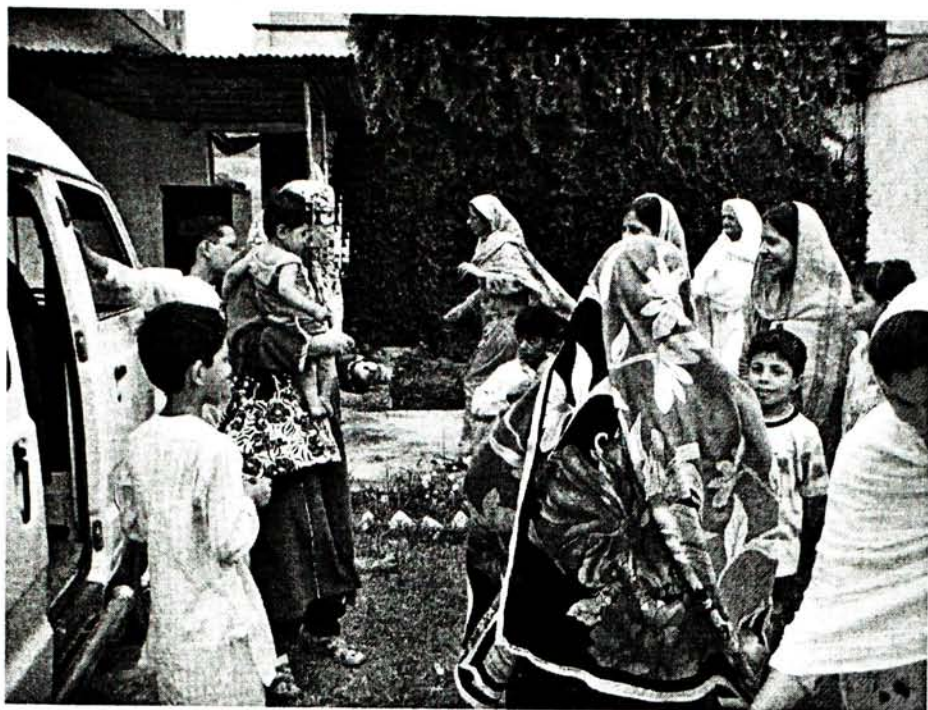


Figure 7.2: When Adaza (the one next to the van) reached her parents-in-law's home in Pakistan, she wore the grey *abbaya* as she always does in Hong Kong. However, underneath her *abbaya*, there was a good-quality *shalwar kameez* from the United Kingdom. This indicates that she tried to show off her wealth and taste in fashion while observing the concept of *purdah* in Pakistan.



Figure 7.3: Jannat is wearing *abbaya* when going out in Lahore in Pakistan, although she wore Western clothes when she reached Rawalpindi airport. She quickly blended in with the cultural values of Lahore for modest women.

Both Asba and Adaza had a few sets of new clothes made for them in Pakistan. Adza had her clothes ready before she went to Pakistan because her husband ordered the tailor to make them for her a few weeks before she arrived in



Pakistan.<sup>74</sup> When I asked Asba how much the clothes cost her, she said, “Don’t ask. It is too expensive.” Asba also used her new clothes to perform her higher social status after she had lived in Hong Kong for two years. However, Asba not only transforms her identity from Pakistani to Hongkongese through her clothes but also through the camera that she brought with her to the village in Pakistan (Figure 7.4). Although the camera belongs to her brother, this Japanese Canon brand camera, which costs at least HKD5000, gives her upper-class status in her village in Pakistan. Even though she might not have intended to show off with her camera, the camera itself seemed too expensive for any of the villagers to afford.

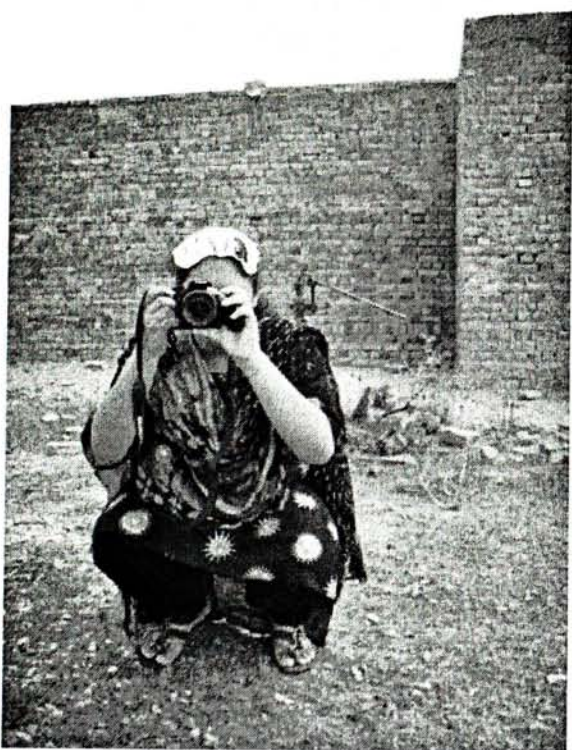


Figure 7.4: Asba is wearing the *shalwar kameez*, which is too expensive for her to disclose the price, and is holding her camera which shows off her social status and differences from her relatives in the village.

Jannat, Adaza and Asba look “westernized” in front of their relatives because of their Hong Kong experience. However, they are keen to protect their image as “good” and “modest” Pakistani women and hence try to keep their religious and

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<sup>74</sup> Adaza’s husband went to Pakistan in February 2009 and stayed there for half a year to monitor the decoration of the new house. Adaza went to Pakistan in July 2009 after her husband came back to Hong Kong because her husband needed to take care of the teenage girls who stayed in Hong Kong. When Adaza’s husband was in Pakistan, he bought a few sets of clothes for Adaza so that she could wear new clothes immediately when she reached home in Pakistan.



traditional qualities. When Jannat arrived home, her mother accused her of not wearing the *dupata* (Pakistani scarf) in Hong Kong. However Jannat exclaimed that she did and asked me to “testify” on her behalf. Also, on the first day, Jannat changed from her Western clothes, telling me, “My brothers did not blame me for wearing Hong Kong clothes. But all the people here on the streets would stare at me. I know it is not good to do so here.” Dress, as described by Ku, is pivotal to Jannat. She changed to Pakistani clothes for fear of criticism from both relatives and strangers. In this way, “the social control of the body” allowed Jannat to blend in and keep a socially acceptable image, as she reverted from a Hongkongese identity to a Pakistani identity (Ku 2006:291).

Asba downplayed her cosmopolitan image by not wearing make-up or any Western dress. Most of my informants tend to dress up when they go back to Pakistan from Hong Kong. They usually use dress to show that they have improved their living standard after moving to Hong Kong. However, Asba is not a typical migrant going back to Pakistan. She admits that her old friends in Pakistan would think that she is “upgraded” after she moved to Hong Kong. She also knows that her mother and relatives expect her to dress in a nice way and fit her middle-class social status in Pakistan. Her mother encourages her to buy new clothes and spruce herself up. She used to dress up and beautify herself when she went out in Pakistan before she settled in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, Asba felt that she did not have to dress up anymore after observing how other Hong Kong Chinese live in Hong Kong. She realized that there is no need to show off through dress because the quality inside a person is more important than his/her appearance. Thus, she claimed that she was “worse” than before in terms of the ways she dresses. Asba also understands that the people who are in Pakistan may comment on her negatively if she becomes very

arrogant after going to Hong Kong. Therefore, she became very aware of whether she is acting properly and humbly. She explained,

I am just a very ordinary person. When I moved to Hong Kong, I find that people usually do not express themselves too much. When I go back to Pakistan, a relative said to me, 'You don't lose your good characters. You don't dress up. You are very simple.' She said this because when my cousin finished her master's degree, she started to speak English all the time. But I speak in Punjabi... After I heard this, I feel that it is okay not to dress up.

It happened that none of these three women like wearing gold when they go back to Pakistan. Nonetheless, it is common for Pakistani women on flights to Pakistan to wear expensive accessories underneath their *abbaya*. Some informants who do not like showing off with gold jewelry explained that the women who wear *abbaya* but have jewelry underneath are from villages, and are not educated. Jannat said, "Those women think that by wearing gold they can show that their husband earns a lot of money in Hong Kong."

To maintain a good image, one does not only need to dress in a Pakistani way but also behave humbly. During her visit, Adaza socialized warmly and lived in a down-to-earth way with her in-laws. Although she built her new house and of course a new kitchen, she seldom ate inside her own house, which was newly decorated. Most of the time, she spent the evening and ate on the floor with her sisters-in-law in the old house where she lived before she moved to Hong Kong five years ago. She was keen to show that she has always been a good daughter-in-law by enjoying the evening on the *charpai* (string beds) in the garden with her in-laws.

Therefore, although Adaza may be seen as a "cynical performer" in Goffman's terms, she is one who does not delude her audiences, her in-laws, for her own interest but for the interest of the joint family system (cf. Goffman 1959). She acts like a very good daughter-in-law in front of her parents-in-law and shows her respect to the elderly. Even though she hates the joint family system, she does not



want to disrespect her audiences, especially her parents-in-law. Adaza's audiences would not allow her to be sincere. Her in-laws would not want to see Adaza showing dissatisfaction toward them (Goffman 1959:18).<sup>75</sup> Thus, Adaza hides her own feeling and keeps the family happy and stable without causing any problems.

Although my key informants think that it is not necessary to show off with gold jewelry when they go back to Pakistan, there are other ways of performing through dress. Their ways of performances vary and depend on their family background and perception of modernity and tradition. Let me focus on the double standard in changing dress in the following section.

### **Double Standard for Dress**

There is a double standard for Jannat in terms of whether Western clothes are appropriate for Pakistanis. Jannat wore Western clothes when she went back to Pakistan, but she felt uncomfortable when she saw other Pakistanis becoming more westernized. For example, Jannat did not like what she saw, when her neighbor, a Pakistani man (who took the same flight with us to Islamabad), wore an oversized red Adidas jersey with blue jeans. Later, on the way to Lahore, Jannat saw a woman dressed in a suit and her response was, "Many people dress like this these days. They are from an 'advanced' family." "Advanced" or "modern" are negative comments as explained by my informants because wearing Western clothes shows their body shape and is not appropriate for good Pakistani women. However, it is thought that better-educated urban women in Pakistan may wear Western clothes. Jannat showed her disapproval when she commented to me on this woman. She did not expect

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<sup>75</sup> In fact, Adaza claimed that she is the best daughter-in-law among the four of them. She said, "*Babaji* [Adaza's father-in-law] likes me the most among his four daughters-in-law. He knows that I lived in Hong Kong [Adaza was born in Hong Kong and lived in Hong Kong until she was 11 years old.] but was willing to live with them in the village for 14 years." When her father-in-law saw her in the hospital after five years being apart, he wept, held her hand and chatted for a long while.

women in Pakistan to enjoy the prestige of wearing Western clothes, which, she felt, was a privilege of Pakistanis overseas.

Jannat remarked, "Shame on you!" after seeing a photo on my camera of me wearing a sleeveless dress at a banquet. At that moment I was worried, not knowing, whether she was being serious or not. Later, she tried to show my picture to her female family members. When I found out, I secretly deleted the photo after she returned my camera, for fear of arousing further criticisms or causing embarrassment. Afterwards, she exclaimed, "Where's the picture?" when she tried showing it to other people. I embarrassingly said that "I deleted it!" Then, surprisingly, she said, "It is so beautiful! Why did you do that?" And it was not until this moment that I understood what she had thought about the photo. She had not been serious when she teased me by saying, "Shame on you". After this, I realized that Jannat has an open-minded view toward what I wear. I assume this is probably because I am a non-Muslim Hong Kong Chinese. Thus, she judged Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis with different standards.

In summary, Jannat accepts non-Muslim dress in a Western and fashionable way. However, she does not accept Pakistanis dressing in a Western way. Thus, Pakistani women in Hong Kong, like Jannat, have a double standard regarding dress.

### **Reasons for the Double Standard**

It is not difficult to understand why Jannat has different criteria when judging Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis in Hong Kong, versus Pakistanis in Pakistan. On the one hand, she faces extreme pressure from her family members in Pakistan. They do not like women wearing "unpleasantly" sleeveless attire, which in turn has caused her to be cautious when choosing what to wear. Once, her brother jokingly said, "I will kill you if I see you wearing sleeveless shirts!" Her liberal husband encourages



her to wear Western clothes in order to avoid social and cultural exclusion. Therefore, Jannat believes she has the freedom to choose whatever she wants to wear, though not sleeveless tops, in Hong Kong. As for her expectations she seems to be aware of the fashion sense of Hong Kong Chinese and also the difference in cultural values between Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis. Thus, although she looked surprised, when she first saw my photo, Jannat did not judge me, but reacted in a joking manner instead.

In short, Pakistani women wear their best clothes when they go back to Pakistan from Hong Kong because they want to look their best. In the case of Jannat, she changed her dress from Pakistani clothes in Hong Kong to Western clothes in Pakistan. She wanted to demonstrate her Westernized, cosmopolitan image, which was different from her female relatives in Pakistan. Adaza, in turn, demonstrated her Hong Kong image by wearing a different big shawl. While all the women in the village wore green, she wore white color shawls, which shows that she is not from the village. Asba also used her professional camera and wore new clothes when she visited her relatives and old classmates in Pakistan. Thus, dress is a way to show off their cosmopolitan images or high moral standards. It can also show their flexibility in adapting to the life of Hong Kong. Even when wearing Pakistani clothes, there are subtle differences, as reflected in Adaza's case. Is it a set of new clothes? Where are the clothes from? When should one wear a shawl or the *abbaya*? What do other people wear on the same occasion? All these factors determine how these Pakistani women shift their identities through dress.

### **Performing Moral Appearance through Investment**

One important way to build higher status in Pakistan revolves around maintaining

moral appearance through buying or building houses and sending home remittances.

In this section, I will first illustrate how Jannat shows her middle-class status in Pakistan by her financial capability to buy land and properties. Then I will discuss how Adaza makes use of her husband's money to build a house next to her in-laws' home.

### **Buying New Land and Properties**

After discussing it with her husband, Jannat bought a piece of land in 2007 of around 5 *marla* (1100 sq feet), and then sold it at a good price a year later.<sup>76</sup> Her husband also thinks that investing in land and properties is a good way for them to improve their economic situation. Since Jannat's husband is unfamiliar with land and property development in Pakistan, Jannat was responsible for all the investment there. She used her husband's savings to buy a single-storey house of 5 *marla* on a block of land in Bahria Town, which was still under construction, as mentioned in Chapter 6. To recap, this house cost 3,199,000 Pakistani rupees (around USD39,000) when we visited it in January 2009. Bahria Town, located in the huge area for private housing in Islamabad, is regarded as upper-middle class and with safe homes. These houses will be furnished with luxurious imported furniture and electrical appliances, including an oven and a shower cubicle with massage functions.

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<sup>76</sup> One *marla* equals to 272.25 square feet.





Figure 7.5: This is a demonstration house, which is 6 times the size of the house Jannat bought, but she showed this photo to Hong Kong Chinese friends and claimed that this was her house.

For Adaza, the way to show off is also through her properties. She bought the land next to her in-law's house years ago and built a house on it. This house has two-stories with four large bedrooms and a large balcony (see Chapter 3). Recently, Adaza and her husband have decorated the house with basic furnishing, none of it new. The house does not have any curtains, but was equipped with beds, big fans, nice carpets and lighting.

Adaza and her husband demand a high quality of living. They bought some electrical appliances such as a microwave oven (HKD1100), a refrigerator (HKD2200), and an automatic washing machine (HKD4700). This is a huge amount for her brother-in-law, who only earns HKD600 a month in Pakistan. When Adaza looked for an automatic washing machine, it took her a few days to find it in the town nearby, Wah Cantt. In the end, she and her brother-in-law drove to Rawalpindi,



which is two hours drive away from home, to buy an automatic washing machine.

[Figure 7.6, 7.7].

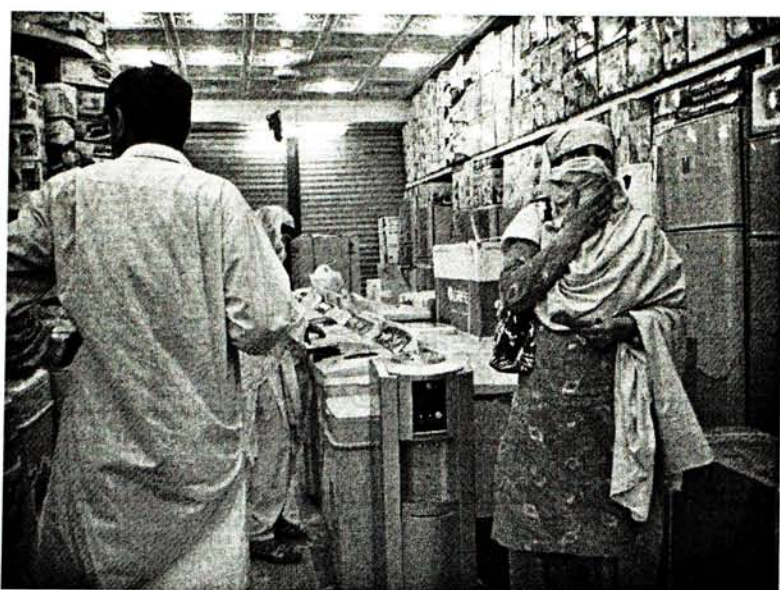


Figure 7.6: Shopping in Rawalpindi in the evening for a washing machine.

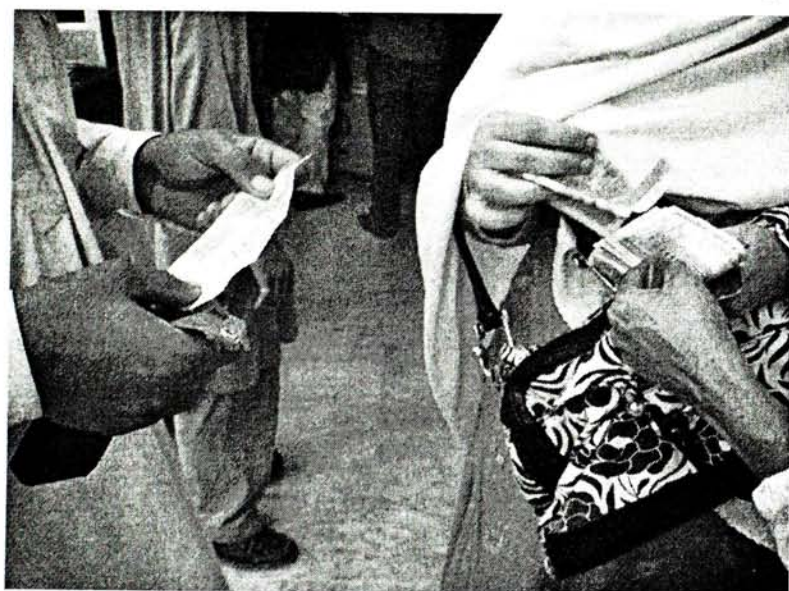


Figure 7.7: Adaza bought a washing machine in both Hong Kong dollars and Pakistani rupees because she did not have enough cash. Interestingly, the shop owner accepted this arrangement.

Building and furnishing the house in Pakistan is a long process for Adaza as her husband does not have a very high salary. It is difficult for them to accumulate a large sum of money to furnish the house all at once. However, building the house is for their future. Adaza wants to go back to Pakistan with her husband when he retires and they need a house like this to ensure their quality of life in Pakistan (also see Chapter 6). When Adaza and her children went back to Hong Kong in August 2009, the new electrical appliances were all left idle. It is unclear when they will go back



again and enjoy their spacious home.

Adaza held a housewarming day: she wanted to invite her close female relatives and neighbors to her new house and *dua* [pray/read the Koran together]. She asked her nieces and sisters-in-law to invite the relatives to come over. She spent around HKD 1500 on food for the occasion, which equals three months' salary of a driver in Pakistan (PKR15,000). This amount of money includes the fees for chefs to cook at her home, *chapatti*, fruit and the tent. This party served over 100 guests, all of whom were women and children. All her sisters-in-law helped cut the fruit and prepare the tea for the guests. Her brother-in-law drove to buy over 200 pieces of *chapatti* (bread) to serve the curry cooked by the chefs. All the guests sat on the beds or floors, shared some fruit, and chatted before sharing the big feast. These visitors also dressed up and brought many gifts for Adaza, such as glassware and teapots. That day, Adaza received various gifts for her new house and gained attention from all the guests.

Being the host, Adaza was responsible for entertaining the guests and showing them around her new house. The guests were curious about her new automatic washing machine. She stood in front of her washing machine and explained how an automatic washing machine works, although no one in the family knew how to use this particular machine because there was only an English but no Urdu manual. Then they moved to the kitchen and admired Adaza's new refrigerator, microwave oven, and the lighting design in the sitting room.

This new house is the "setting" for Adaza to perform her identity (Goffman 1959:22). "A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performances cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their

performance when they leave it” (Goffman 1959:22). This new house is also the stage on which the furniture and electrical appliances are the “stage props”. The day of the housewarming gave Adaza a chance to perform on the stage, her new house. Adaza has a high social status which the other neighbors and relatives do not have. As Goffman (1959:22) says, “It is only in exceptional circumstances that the setting follows along with the performers; we see this in the ....dream-like possessions that kings and queens are made of. In the main, these exceptions seem to offer some kind of extra protection for performers who are, or who have momentarily become, highly sacred”. For example, the washing machine is a “dream-like possession” for most Adaza’s relatives. These possessions grant Adaza higher social status but this only happens when she is at her house in Pakistan.

### **Hiding Lower-Class Hong Kong Lives in Pakistan**

Because these women have higher social status in Pakistan, it is inevitable that they hide what their social status is in Hong Kong. For example, they do not want to let their family members know about their work in Hong Kong. Jannat once told her mother about her job and the latter was surprised that her daughter worked as a “dish washer” (meaning junior or cleaning staff in a salon) so Jannat never mentioned it again. Likewise, Asba never tells any relatives that her father works as a watchman in Hong Kong.

The relatives of the Pakistani women I interviewed know that my informants are lower-class residents in Hong Kong but this does not affect their higher social status in Pakistan. “When we go overseas, we work hard. When we stay in Pakistan, we don’t work hard. If you work too hard, you don’t live well – working too many hours a day affects the quality of life. And if you work as a builder, people think that it is not of a high social status. When you work outside the country, you do not tell



others what you do because you feel that it is a low-class job,” Jannat’s brother said.

What does it mean for Jannat when her relatives know about her social status in Hong Kong? This issue was carefully avoided by Jannat and their relatives. Jannat felt quite safe that her “distant” relatives would not visit her in Hong Kong. Her distant relatives would thus not know the exact economic situation Jannat was in. Throughout the trips to Pakistan, Jannat and other Pakistani women carefully managed their image in front of their relatives. They strived to present their middle-class image and hide their difficult lives in Hong Kong, although their close family members understood their financial situations well.

My informants’ distant relatives in Pakistan may not dare discredit the performers face to face because this may bring embarrassment and hence disharmonious relations. Since Pakistani women contribute to their in-laws’ home financially, physically, and emotionally, their audiences react to their performances with trust. This is a transaction of money and face. Pakistani women and their husbands in Hong Kong support their Pakistani family financially in return for face, respect and higher social status. Pakistani women also change their behaviors because their relatives in Pakistan expect them to act like respectful overseas nationals who contribute much to their joint family households in Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown why and how Pakistani women shift their identities through their dress and investment in Pakistan. All these performances by Pakistani women from Hong Kong to present their wealth and social status as well as overseas image, ranging from new clothes to housewarming parties, are consistent with social values in Pakistan, where people expect the overseas Pakistanis to be richer and of

higher social status than those who stay in Pakistan.<sup>77</sup> This is why, “when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole” (Goffman 1959:35). Pakistanis who moved overseas are expected to give gifts, build houses and wear nice clothes when they go back to Pakistan because, in general, the country to which Pakistanis migrate, like Hong Kong, Britain or Canada, is “perceived as an advanced land where the people are rich and educated” (Khan 1977:69). Pakistani women who go back from Hong Kong to Pakistan thus entertain the audiences with idealized performances. Such performances by Pakistani women meet the expectation of their relatives in Pakistan and show that Pakistani women who come back to Pakistan have climbed the social ladder.

Even if Pakistani women want to reveal that they are not as prosperous as the audience may think, the audience would not allow it to happen. “The audience can see a great saving of time and emotional energy in the right to treat the performer at occupational face value” (Goffman 1959:49). The relatives of Pakistani women expect that there are differences between Pakistani women who moved to Hong Kong and themselves. Hence, they expect that those who moved to Hong Kong will act in different way. For example, Asba’s relatives expected her to wear fancy clothes and thought that it was the normal procedure for overseas nationals going to Pakistan. Jannat’s elder sister was not surprised that Jannat wore Western clothes because she

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<sup>77</sup> However, there are some rare situations which are very different from my informants’ cases. There are a few Pakistani women that are not as prosperous as their parents or relatives. They even rely on their parents to financially support them in the first few years of marriage. Their family members in Pakistan are so wealthy that they can afford to send their children to the United Kingdom for education. Therefore, whether Pakistani women can show off their cosmopolitan identities depends on how wealthy the Pakistani women in Hong Kong and their family members are in Pakistan. As most informants are wealthier than their counterparts in Pakistan, they can shift their identities as higher-class overseas nationals, but this is not always the case.



thinks that it is acceptable for Jannat to do so, as she lives in Hong Kong. If my informants' relatives try to poke about and ask about the exact living conditions my informants have in Hong Kong, there would be difficulties.

Although this chapter has mostly focused on the changing behaviors of my three informants who went back to Pakistan, we should not neglect the fact that these women also perform when they are in Hong Kong. Such performances can be carried out with a consistent logic – to show off their improved socio-economic status and keep their religious image. On the one hand, in Hong Kong, there seems to be no need for my informants to show off in front of other Pakistani women who also reside in the territory. It seems that there is little to hide, as being poor is a common experience of many of them. On the other hand, my informants still have to hide some of their lives in front of other Hong Kong-Pakistani women. For example, Jannat lied that she did not work as a dishwasher but rather said that she was a hairwasher in a salon. To her, being a hairwasher is at least better than being a dishwasher. I also witnessed how Jannat wanted to present a good image in front of British Pakistanis who visited her neighbor. Jannat put on her golden earrings and make-up in a purple *shalwar kameez*. In addition, many Pakistani women feel that they have a subtle competition among Pakistanis in the same community. Some Pakistani women's husbands thrived by making good businesses or changing jobs. Their children may be able to start up their businesses or embarked on careers as doctors, teachers or lawyers. These Pakistani women are able to distinguish themselves from later immigrants who still live in public housing or old private housing. They are able to perform in front of other Pakistanis by having better consumer goods, such as plasma televisions or cars. Also, these performances can be a demonstration of strong beliefs in Islam rather than the increase in wealth within

Hong Kong. For example, this can be done through an invitation to all neighbors for their success in fasting for a prolonged period of time. The faith in God and persistence in fasting brings honor to the Pakistani women and polishes their image as religious women in the community.

Not all women in Pakistan have to veil for fear of others' judgments and comments. It all depends on where these women live and whom they are with. Pakistan is not always an uncomfortable and unsafe place for Pakistani women. For instance, Pakistani women can be relaxed if they are with females and children only. They can even put away their *dupata* if there are no men in their homes. This is rare – only if the Pakistani men are out of town or work overseas and the fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law are not at home. Pakistani women seem to be relaxed because they know that women in their family would not bother about whether they veil or not when they are with females only. In a village I visited, Pakistani women who washed clothes took off their *shalwar* and took baths in the river.

Thus far I have highlighted that when Pakistani women go back to Pakistan, they position themselves or are positioned as overseas Pakistanis, who are middle-class or upper-class. In the concluding chapter, I will further explore the implications of the senses of identity and home for Hong Kong Pakistani women in the study of migration and transnationalism.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have discussed the lives, homes, and shifting identities of transnational Pakistani women, between Hong Kong and Pakistan. Unlike most Pakistani women in Hong Kong, these women live between two homes because they travel between Hong Kong and Pakistan regularly. In this concluding chapter, I discuss the tension faced by Pakistani women living between two places, and then illuminate some larger implications for the future of these women's identities. I also discuss the implications for the studies of transnational migration. I examine the roles of Pakistani women and Hong Kong Chinese in maintaining racial harmony in Hong Kong toward the end of this chapter.

### **Summary of Chapters**

In Chapter 2, I laid the foundation and background for the South Asian diaspora and migration of Pakistani women to Hong Kong. South Asian Muslims began coming to Hong Kong under the British since the beginning of colonial rule. However, most Pakistani migrants in Hong Kong are latecomers and are usually unrelated to this earlier group of Muslims. Most Pakistanis who live in Hong Kong today arrived between the 1950s and 1990s. Pakistani men came to Hong Kong to work for the colonial government or the private sector, or to reunite with their relatives in Hong Kong. Some Pakistani women came to Hong Kong because they are the descendents of policemen and other officials recruited from Pakistan during the 1950s. Others are bride migrants who married Hong Kong Pakistanis, and/or are the descendents of Chinese-Pakistani couples in Hong Kong. The subjects of this research are the women who lead transnational lives because they travel back and forth between

## Hong Kong and Pakistan.

After identifying the background of Pakistani women, I showed how Pakistani women live in Hong Kong and Pakistan in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. These three chapters aim to give a complete picture of Pakistani women's lives between these two places. Chapter 3 showed the differences between the two societies in terms of living environment, family system, and social status. On one hand, transnational Pakistani women live in a rural environment in Pakistan, while on the other they live in a crowded environment in Hong Kong. They enjoy the spacious houses and natural environment in Pakistan at the same time as they live in tiny flats in Hong Kong. Hong Kong, however, provides welfare services and advanced technologies, which are not widely available in Pakistan. This chapter also analyzed how my informants live with their joint family members in Pakistan. Since they only live with nuclear family members in Hong Kong, they experience a different way of life, which affects their views of the joint family system. The joint family system in Pakistan can be a source of conflicts, but it can be an important foundation for transnational help and support between relatives in Pakistan and my informants in Hong Kong. In terms of social status, Pakistani women in Hong Kong are usually Punjabis who form the majority in Pakistan. When they go back to Pakistan, they may discriminate against other ethnic minorities such as Afghan refugees. My informants are middle class when they return to Pakistan as overseas nationals. However, Pakistani women, an ethnic minority group in Hong Kong, are culturally excluded by Hong Kong Chinese.

Chapter 4 examined how Pakistani women adjust themselves as Muslims in Hong Kong and Pakistan by adhering to certain Islamic practices. I used the idea of the cultural supermarket to explain: 1) how these women flexibly select ideas and



values which they have learnt from television programs and the Internet, and 2) how they may be restricted in the social world they are in because of their class, religion or gender. For instance, they may adopt different ways of consuming *halal* food and may discuss sex openly. However, they are restricted in choosing how they hold their funerals because of the needs to entertain their relatives in Pakistan and their limited wealth. Despite their higher social status, my informants are not allowed to go to graveyards in Pakistan as women. These women act differently when dealing with different audiences including their parents, unrelated men, relatives in both Hong Kong and Pakistan, and members in the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. Thus, we can see that Pakistani women have to adjust themselves in the social world despite a variety of choices available in the cultural supermarket.

Chapter 5 addressed the problems Pakistani women face as marriage partners and mothers. The common issues my informants face are transnational marriage arrangement, early marriage and lack of education, split households, extra-marital affairs and conflicts with in-laws. My informants often have transnational arranged marriages and may thus experience various problems in marriage and family. For example, in the beginning of the marriage, they would often separate from their husbands and live in the joint family households in Pakistan. As their husbands work in Hong Kong, the Pakistani women I interviewed have had to deal with the problems of split households and the pressures from in-laws on their own in Pakistan. They are also worried that their husbands may have extra-marital affairs. Some Pakistani women choose to get divorced in Hong Kong instead of Pakistan because they have more institutional support in Hong Kong as divorcees. Such divorces also worsen the relationship between them and their in-laws. These problems in marriage and family take place transnationally. The roles of Pakistani women as wives,

mothers, and daughters-in-law are reproduced and renegotiated among the Pakistani women and men in the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. To sum up Chapters 3 to 5, Pakistani women have to adapt to the living environments in both Pakistan and Hong Kong, adjusting their lives as Muslims and negotiating their roles in marriage and family in these two very different societies.

Chapter 6 analyzed the physical and cognitive homes of Pakistani women. These women may fit out their homes in Hong Kong and Pakistan in order to improve their quality of life and demonstrate their senses of modernity. They decorate their homes in Hong Kong with Pakistani-style products and their homes in Pakistan with "Hong Kong" products. They not only recreate their "traditions", but also strengthen their sense of belonging to Pakistan and Hong Kong (cf. Salih 2003). My informants' physical home can reflect how they feel about Pakistan or Hong Kong. In terms of cognitive home, some informants may have two homes, one in Hong Kong, and one in Pakistan, if they plan to live in Pakistan for their retirement after they have saved enough money from working in Hong Kong. Others are more skeptical about the practicality of going back to Pakistan for retirement. They plan to stay in Hong Kong permanently for the future of their children, so they only have one home in Hong Kong. In short, Pakistani women decide where their psychological homes are based on the following factors: 1) their memories of the places where they grew up, 2) the possibility of living in that particular society, and 3) the future plans of their children and other family members.

Chapter 7 explained how Pakistani women shift their identities when they go to Pakistan. I examined the experience of three Pakistani women going home to Pakistan and compare how they shifted their identities through dress, and investment when they were in Pakistan. These three Pakistani women could shift their identities



because 1) Hong Kong signifies prosperity from the perspective of their relatives in Pakistan, 2) Pakistani women from Hong Kong have higher social status than their relatives in Pakistan, and 3) they have more knowledge about Hong Kong and other places such as mainland China than their relatives. They usually use their ways of dress to subtly perform their high-class image to their relatives. They may also invest in land and property and show off their wealth to their relatives in Pakistan. These performances of their identities require the cooperation and recognition of their audiences, as their audiences expect them to perform their higher social status. When these transnational Pakistani women perform their identities, they fulfill the expectations of their relatives in Pakistan.

These seven chapters showed how Pakistani women live in and between these two different worlds. In doing so, they bring about transformations in both Pakistan and Hong Kong through their living experience as rural/urban dwellers, Muslims, marriage partners and overseas Pakistanis. Such transformations can be revealed in their setting of home in Hong Kong and Pakistan, and changing behaviors on their return trips.

### **The Tension between Two Homes**

The double lives of Pakistani women in Hong Kong and Pakistan create tension between their two homes. The tension is due to the fact that my informants have to deal with two different living environments and different audiences. I examine the tension in terms of social classes, their financial burdens, their gendered experiences and religious lives. Then I discuss the dilemma faced by my informants and their children in deciding whether, when and where to ultimately live in the future.

My informants have to endure lower-class lives and racial discrimination in

Hong Kong in order to enjoy middle-class lives in Pakistan. While making money in Hong Kong, my informants and their husbands have to tolerate racial discrimination. The unhappy experience of being discriminated against comes hand in hand with economic opportunities in Hong Kong. My informants often have to hide their lower-class lives in Hong Kong from their relatives in Pakistan. They do not want their relatives to know their living condition in Hong Kong because they find it disgraceful. However, their husbands' income in Hong Kong improves the living standard and social status of my informants and their close family members in Pakistan. This compensates for my informants' loss of prestige as lower-class people in Hong Kong. Therefore, their lives in Hong Kong and Pakistan are complementary to one another if not always (Salih 2003:158).

Having two homes often places heavy financial burdens on my informants, and causes them anxieties. They have to spend a substantial amount of time, energy and money on two households in two different places. Because they need to balance their budgets for their two households, the income of their husbands is divided into two parts. One part is for the daily expenses of their children and their flat in Hong Kong. Another part is for their relatives and house in Pakistan. In Chapter 6, we saw how these women may spend an immense amount of time and money on decorating their flats or houses in both Hong Kong and Pakistan. They have to struggle to meet the requirements from relatives in Pakistan and the needs of their children in Hong Kong. Thus, there is intense pressure on the Pakistani women financially and psychologically.

As women, their different experiences in Hong Kong and Pakistan may intensify the tension they feel between the two places. They enjoy much freedom created by nuclear family residence in Hong Kong. My informants manage the



household without their in-laws' supervision but in cooperation with their husbands in making financial decisions. In Pakistan, my informants have to rely on their brothers-in-law or mothers-in-law to buy food for daily consumption. In Hong Kong, however, they enjoy more opportunities to decide what to buy at home and how much to spend on daily food and other necessities. Their husbands usually do not have time to bother with daily supermarket shopping and when to pay the bills. Adaza and Jannat pass receipts and bills to their husbands and remind them to settle the payments. Sabira said that her husband puts much of his salary in a drawer in the bedroom. She said that whenever she needed money, she did not have to ask her husband and discuss it with him, unless the sum was a huge one.

Among my informants who are married, most do not have to consult their husbands concerning trivial daily expenditures. When these women need to make decisions on whether to buy gold or land, they discuss it with their spouses. In addition, some women who were employed, such as Sabira, who worked at a community centre, saved part of their income and used it for their children's educational payment. Some women who work said that they use their money when their husbands are unemployed. Therefore, after some Pakistani women settled in Hong Kong, such as Adaza and Sabira, they thought that they had greater autonomy over finances. In Hong Kong, they decide how much, when and where to spend, although in cooperation with their husbands because they and their husbands treat each other as trusted partners. With their control over a large sum of money, which they would not have had if they had lived in Pakistan, my informants are more satisfied with their roles in their nuclear family in Hong Kong. Although my informants sometimes do not agree with their husbands on spending, these women still enjoy greater financial decision-making power than they would in Pakistan.

Thus, when my informants go back to Pakistan, they sometimes feel uneasy about the roles they play in the family. They have experienced financial autonomy or at least participated in making financial decisions in Hong Kong. However, they might not be able to do the same thing in Pakistan. This also causes tension for them to live between two places. Finally this depends on how long they stay in Pakistan and Hong Kong. If they stay in Pakistan for a short period only, they would not bother or struggle with this too much. If they stay in Pakistan after living in Hong Kong for a long time, they would have to adapt to a new way of life again in Pakistan.

Apart from a degree of financial independence, my informants enjoy more freedom from social control in Hong Kong. When they were in Pakistan, they must fulfill their obligations every day as sisters-in-law or daughters. In Hong Kong, my informants are almost free from the challenges of joint family residence and can avoid the troubles of living with large numbers of family members under the same roof. They do not have to face daily conflicts with their in-laws because they live in Hong Kong. However, they face difficulties in their daily lives as transnational Pakistani women managing households in both places and playing different gender roles. They still have to be careful to fulfill the roles they have in the joint family household, such as sending remittances to Pakistan and behaving as good daughters-in-law by showing care to the elderly in the family. They may not be willing to send remittances, but they know well that they have the responsibilities to support their relatives. Thus, they have familial roles to play both Hong Kong and Pakistan.

The gender roles of my informants change when they live in Hong Kong in nuclear households. This also creates tension and worries. Most of my informants seem to be empowered by living in Hong Kong, whereas their husbands usually do not have the same experiences. My informants seem to have taken a more active role



in managing the household finances; some even make money outside their homes in Hong Kong. Some said that they and their husbands decide together whether, when and how much money they should spend in Hong Kong and send back home. Thus my informants have a greater autonomy in household finance in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, my informants might eventually spend the rest of their lives in Pakistan with their in-laws because they may plan to retire in Pakistan. If they live in Pakistan for a longer period of time, they might lose their control over finances, since their brothers-in-law or husbands might take control. Some of my informants worry about their future way of life in Pakistan. My informants fear the loss of freedom to work and leave home. Thus, leading transnational lives may allow them to play more independent and active roles in their nuclear families in Hong Kong, but this also creates pressures and worries for them.

My informants' husbands feel the tension between two places as well, but they have different gendered experiences when compared to my informants. These men's images are tarnished because of the stereotype toward Pakistani men in Hong Kong. Pakistani men are often seen as illegal immigrants or people who may do harm to society in the eyes of Hong Kong Chinese. The Pakistani men I interviewed said that they experience much rejection at work and racial discrimination by Hong Kong Chinese. They said that they have conflicts with their Hong Kong Chinese or mainland Chinese colleagues. My informants' husbands who work as construction workers are often seen as scapegoats, causing unemployment, by their Hong Kong Chinese colleagues. When these men go back to Pakistan, they assume a higher social status and significant role in the community in their home villages. As overseas Pakistani men, they may direct the building of a new mosque or paving of a main road in the village. Their high social status and prestige in Pakistan is a sharp

contrast to their lower social status in Hong Kong. Thus, this may create tension for my informants' husbands between Hong Kong and Pakistan, and hence tension between my informants who want to stay in Hong Kong and their husbands who want to go home.

As Muslim women, my informants have to entertain two different groups of audiences in Hong Kong and Pakistan. In Hong Kong, when my informants veil and wear *shalwar kameez*, they tend to be culturally excluded because the mainstream Hong Kong Chinese do not accept such a way of dress. However, when they are in front of Pakistanis, they are expected to dress in a modest way, which means wearing *shalwar kameez* and veiling properly. The Pakistani relatives expect my informants to protect themselves with the *abbaya* or at least with the veil (see Chapter 5). How can Pakistani women meet the expectations of both Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis when both groups live in Hong Kong? My informants do not want to be discriminated against and therefore some of them change to Western clothes. However, in doing so, they are challenged, commented on, and even sexually harassed by other Pakistanis. Thus, we can see that there is tension when my informants want to fulfill the expectations of both Pakistani and Hong Kong Chinese audiences. They can sense the difficulties of moving between two different cultures and expectations for women and Muslims.

Needless to say, there are also other difficulties encountered by my informants as Muslims. For example, they have to take the initiative to pray because there are usually no mosques near their home, which would announce to remind them the time to pray. When they fast during Ramadan, they may still have to work at home and outside their homes. Some of my informants' husbands must quit their jobs during Ramadan since they lack the energy to work. This brings financial



pressure to their families and conflicts between my informants and their husbands. As a result, we can see that my informants face tension living as Muslims in non-Muslim-friendly Hong Kong.

Having two homes causes my informants to be in constant negotiation over their sense of belonging. When they are in Pakistan they may identify themselves as Hongkongese, but when they stay in Hong Kong they are regarded as Pakistanis. They interact with people of different backgrounds, ethnicity, class and age, and shift their identities in different situations. Although they may have a place that they belong to and feel very connected to (such as Pakistan or Hong Kong), they are aware that Pakistan is not familiar to them anymore and Hong Kong does not accept them. Pakistan is no longer the place that these women are familiar with because it has also undergone various changes since they left. Pakistani women were upset that the economy of Pakistan has deteriorated, inflation is high, and the government remains corrupt. Hong Kong is a place with strong stereotypes toward people of Indian subcontinental phenotype. As long as the strong sentiment against the non-Western and non-Hong Kong Chinese still exists, Pakistanis will not be accepted as Hong Kong people, and they will remain lower class. What can Pakistani women do when they are stuck with a choice between two places which are not comfortable for them to live in?

This is especially difficult for Pakistani women who have to decide when to settle down in one particular place. There are ongoing struggles in these women's minds. When can they stop flying between two countries? When they are in Pakistan, they miss their children in Hong Kong; when they stay in Hong Kong, they are worried about their aging parents and investments in Pakistan. Such split households can last for more than twenty years. When will this separation end? In the Pakistani

cultural context as in my other sources, family is one of the most important elements in one's life, but these Pakistani women's family members are split across the oceans. Therefore, Pakistani women who live between two places experience a heavy burden in their lives.

When deciding where to settle, my informants have to negotiate with their husbands. Sometimes, their husbands may want to live in Pakistan after retirement because their lives are more "relaxing" in Pakistan than in Hong Kong. However, my informants often prefer Hong Kong because of its freedom, economic benefits and educational and employment opportunities for their children. Therefore, there may be a constant tension not only within their minds, but also with their husbands in choosing their homes. Their husbands may think that they should go back to Pakistan eventually, but they themselves may want to settle in Hong Kong. Sabira wants to stay in Hong Kong but her husband does not. She feels that she would not get good quality of life in Pakistan because she would be poor. She would need much money to ensure that her children can receive a good education. However, going back to Pakistan can only be a dream for some informants because settling in Pakistan may mean sacrificing the economic opportunities available in Hong Kong. As Asba said, "It is fancy to think about going back, but I cannot go back there anymore because I have already adapted to my life here."

Such tensions can extend to the children of these migrant women. As a second-generation Pakistani migrant, Asba, who has never lived with her father for more than half a year in Pakistan, has to decide whether to live in Hong Kong or Pakistan in the future. She lived in Pakistan until she was 23 years old and has recently moved to Hong Kong. She felt the tension of Pakistani migrants living between Hong Kong and Pakistan throughout her childhood because of her parents'



experience. Living in a split household, she also has a negative impression of the relationship between her parents. Thus, the tension increases and affects second generation migrants like Asba. She also senses that her social status changes as she moves from Pakistan to Hong Kong. She is middle class in Pakistan but lower class in Hong Kong. She did not let me visit her in Hong Kong because she felt uneasy about showing her barely furnished flat in a very old building. However, she welcomed me to stay with her in Pakistan: her three-story house was very nicely decorated and spacious with a big dog. Indeed, the tension of migrants about these two places repeats itself in the second generation Pakistanis in Hong Kong.

This leads to the question of these women's futures. Will these transnational Pakistani women continue to live in flux? It is possible that this situation of "living between two homes" will continue as long as the next generation, who have grown up in Hong Kong, continue to have close connections with Pakistan. These are some of my observations of my informants: if Pakistani women grow up and receive education in Pakistan, they may have strong feeling toward Pakistan because of their experiences there. Or, if they marry their kin in Pakistan, they may continue to have close connections with their relatives in both places. In other instances, if these women and their husbands move back to Pakistan to retire and leave their children in Hong Kong, this will keep the next generation connected to Pakistan because they may continue to visit their old parents in Pakistan regularly. However, even if the children have never lived in Pakistan, they may still have a chance to lead transnational lives. "Since many of these children have been raised in households saturated by homeland influences, even those who express little interest in their roots have the knowledge and skills to activate these values and identities if and when they decide to do so" (Levitt 2004). Thus, my informants' children may continue and have

the ability to keep transnational connections with their relatives in Pakistan.

I argue that if the following conditions are fulfilled, these women will continue to live transnationally: 1) the living standard of Hong Kong remains higher than that of Pakistan, 2) Pakistanis continue to have few employment opportunities in Pakistan and see Hong Kong as a place for making money, 3) Pakistanis keep their close ties with their relatives in Pakistan through various ways, such as visits, transnational marriage and childcare. Hence, these Pakistani women may continue to be “astronauts”, who travel between Pakistan and Hong Kong for their children and relatives.

In short, the Pakistani women I interviewed have double roles as they have different social statuses, financial burdens, gendered experiences, and religious lives in Hong Kong and Pakistan. They have to negotiate their sense of belonging in these two places. They are also under pressure in deciding when and where to eventually settle down. Such decisions may affect their relationships with their husbands and the future of their children. These all lead to tension for Pakistani women living between two places.

### **Implications for the Future of Pakistani Women's Identities**

In this section, I discuss how Pakistani women view their identities as Pakistanis and Muslims, and the future of such identities. Firstly, I examine their views of self in terms of home and identity. Secondly, I discuss the importance of Islamic practices in keeping their Pakistani identities. Thirdly, I analyze the future of Pakistani women's identities given that they persist in keeping Pakistani identities, despite flexibilities in performances as shown in Chapter 7. Fourthly, I discuss how the children of Pakistani women may affect their identities.



There is no single rule regarding how my informants see their homes and identities. Some may think of Hong Kong as home; others may see both Hong Kong and Pakistan as their homes. Some informants say that Pakistan is not their home anymore, but it is hard for them to abandon their Pakistani identity. As I mentioned in the last chapter, in Ku et al's (2003:40) study, nearly 90% of the respondents claim to be Pakistanis, while only around 2% see themselves as both Hongkongese and Pakistanis. Like these other Pakistanis, my informants strongly identify themselves as Pakistanis, even though they realize that they may not make their homes in Pakistan permanently. Indeed, some informants may still view Pakistan as their home, although they live in Hong Kong most of the time. Thus, we can see that my informants' sense of Pakistani identity is very strong. Regardless of where they make their homes, they still see themselves as Pakistanis.

Islam is important in keeping my informants' Pakistani identities in Hong Kong because their practices make them distinct from most Hong Kong Chinese. As they practice Islam, my informants once again are reminded that they are not in a Muslim-friendly society. They are the outsiders of Hong Kong Chinese society. In addition, my informants said that their culture is closely linked to their religion. Sometimes the practices of Islam can overlap with their Pakistani cultural practices, such as *purdah*. My informants teach their children Muslim practices and instill sense of Pakistani identity to their children. They hope to pass their cultural values to younger generations of Hong Kong Pakistanis so that they may embrace their Pakistani and Muslim identities. An 8-year-old child once said to me before he went to bed, "We Pakistanis pray like this before we go to bed." Indeed, this may be the child's confusion in distinguishing Pakistani cultural and Islamic religious practices. However, this also implies that Islamic practices may keep children's identity as

Pakistanis. Mina, a first-generation migrant raised in Hong Kong, said, "We will be Muslim Pakistanis forever. From what we eat, we can be reminded that we are Muslims and we are forever Pakistanis." This shows that Islamic practices and Pakistani identities are closely linked to each other in my informants' minds. Being Muslims overseas can make my informants be connected to their country and strengthen their sense of belonging. Thus, I expect that many Pakistani women and their future generations will continue to keep their Pakistani identity through their religion.

However, as I have shown in Chapters 4 and 7, most of my informants are flexible in choosing their values and ideas in the cultural supermarket. My informants enjoy freedom in choosing how to practice their religion. For example, they may be flexible in choosing their food and consume McDonalds' which signifies global and cosmopolitan taste in food. Their transnational status between Hong Kong and Pakistan gives my informants chances to embrace different senses of identity. For example, McDonalds', pizzas and kebab may mean modernity to them. Their Pakistani identity can therefore be given new meanings when they practice their religion in Hong Kong in a different way than they could have in Pakistan. This is because when they go back to Pakistan, they act differently when compared to their relatives who have never left the country. Simply from the way they consume food and drinks, they attain a different image as Muslim Pakistanis. They have a choice of living strictly as Muslims at some moments but living in a relaxed way at other times. In short, my informants may carefully follow their religious and cultural roots, but they are also aware of the changing world. They can make use of the information they access and opportunities they have to lead different lives as Muslim Pakistanis. Hence, they gradually transform their Pakistani and Muslim identities and



will likely continue to do so in the future.

While they question and sometimes challenge Pakistani cultural practices, they still adhere to these values, even when they live in Hong Kong. For instance, they skip prayers because they are too busy, but they are totally aware that they need to pray as Muslims. They complain about the joint family system and their greedy in-laws, but they fully understand the benefits of living in a joint family system. They never try to break free from the whole joint family system and may even build a new house next to their in-laws. They complain about how unsupportive their husbands are, but at the same time they assume that all women are supposed to get married and have children. They forget the exact dates of Pakistani National Day and Independence Day, but they see themselves as patriotic Pakistanis. This shows that these women uphold patriarchal values and their national identities, although they may live flexibly as Muslims, wives, and mothers in their daily lives. They may keep their identities as Pakistanis in spite of minor adjustments and different views of various Pakistani cultural practices.

Similarly, some of my informants may have led different lives in Hong Kong by living in “nuclear” households, working and limiting family size. Such changes do not necessarily mean that my informants forgo their Pakistani cultural values. Rather, when they work outside their homes, they hope to improve the socio-economic status of their family in both Hong Kong and Pakistan, and guard their interest in the *biradari* (relatives, patrilineage). In other words, even after my informants migrated to Hong Kong, the ways they plan their finances or marriage of their children usually revolve around their interests in the *biradari*. Thus, even though my informants have experienced many changes in Hong Kong, they still adhere to some Pakistani cultural values. As Shaw (2000:292) notes, such actions as

changing employment patterns or forms of residence “can still be interpreted in terms of the desire to acquire property and status in traditional terms, even when they might appear to indicate the contrary”. My informants still adhere to Pakistani cultural values and hence Pakistani identities, for their interests in the *biradari*, although they seem to have changed considerably in Hong Kong.

The Pakistani parents who moved to Hong Kong with children growing up in Hong Kong often face tensions regarding their values and identities. Some informants teach their children to adhere to Pakistani cultural values. These values include being a religious Muslim, having a sense of belonging to Pakistan, being able to speak Urdu, and having an arranged marriage.<sup>78</sup> The children may embrace the Hong Kong practices, or adopt liberal and globalized values. For example, Namira, an introverted 19-year-old girl, who came to Hong Kong when she was 14, wants to become an air hostess. However, she never told her parents about her dream because she knows that her parents would not allow it. Instead, her mother wants to marry her off when she finishes high school. Her parents have privately discussed who will be a good husband for her daughter without letting her know. Namira has a different view of her life and does not see herself as a young woman who will get married soon after high school graduation. However, from her parents’ point of view, the ultimate purpose of Namira’s life is to be a good wife and mother. Her career is not a priority. Some Pakistani children growing up in Hong Kong, or who have migrated from Pakistan to Hong Kong, may embrace a Hong Kong identity but their parents may not do so. These young Pakistanis and their parents may have different views of life and this influences their identities.

Namira may not rebel against her parents. I observed that Namira’s mother

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<sup>78</sup> Urdu is preferred because Punjabi is seen as an inferior language when compared to Urdu, which is the national language.



only lets her go to school, to community centers, and to the supermarket on her own but not anywhere else. Namira seems to be very obedient to her parents, which is particularly expected of the eldest child. Her younger brothers and sisters, who were born and raised in Hong Kong and speak fluent Cantonese, as we can foresee, will probably choose a more Hong Kong way of life than their sister will be able to. How will the identities of these young Pakistanis be affected?

From the point of view of Namira's mother, if she thinks in terms of the feeling or will of her daughter, she may risk losing her good Pakistani image, and be seen as a Hong Kong Pakistani who deviates from Pakistani cultural values. For fear of destroying the family prestige and image within the community, there is little chance that Namira will become an air hostess. Such a "modern" image is related to a Hong Kong identity. The more non-Pakistani way in which they live, the more "Hongkongised" they are seen as having become. In short, if the daughter chose a way which was not conventional in a Pakistani cultural context, her image would become more "Westernised" and "Hongkongised". The parents' image would also be affected. They might be seen as "Westernized", "Hongkongised" or "modern" parents, but they may also be criticized for not teaching their daughter properly.

Nevertheless, the more liberal parents tend to negotiate with their children on choice of spouse and career and this affects the future of Pakistani women's identities. Instead of arranging marriage for the children with poorly educated relatives in Pakistan, who have much difficulty in adapting to a Hong Kong socio-economic environment, some Pakistani women allow their daughters to choose their own spouses. Most informants in Hong Kong understand the need to safeguard their financial interests against relatives in Pakistan through arranged marriage. They also know that it is difficult for new immigrants to adapt to Hong Kong Chinese society.

Thus, they would allow their children to choose their own spouses, who may be more affluent than they are. Malika, 42, who moved to Hong Kong with her Pakistani husband 18 years ago said,

In the United Kingdom, my sister's children bring their 'friends' home.<sup>79</sup> My sister and her husband approve of their marriage. Her daughter is a solicitor and is married to a doctor. If my daughter wants to marry a man, whom she knows well, she will consult me. He will also come and talk to me. I will see if his family background matches ours. If it is fine, his parents will propose. After we approve the proposal, they can get married.

Malika reflects that the identities of Pakistani women will change one day. She accepts the combination of arranged and love marriage for her daughters. She also hopes that her daughters will marry good husbands, rather than men who simply have a Pakistani cultural background but not the ability to adapt to Hong Kong society.

To sum up, most informants identify themselves as Pakistani although they are flexible in changing their identities between Hongkongese and Pakistanis. They may insist on passing their Pakistani and Muslim identities to the next generation. However, they also embrace freedom in Hong Kong and may not practice their religion and gender roles closely. This does not mean that they try to get rid of their Pakistani identities. Rather, this implies that my informants may still maintain their interest in a joint family. The children of my informants may also affect how my informants view and change their identities. Some of my informants insist on keeping their Pakistani identities and not letting their children choose their own husbands. However, some are ready to negotiate their ways of handling important marital decisions. The future identities of Pakistani women seem to be gradually changing, and are affected by their migration experience, how they perceive

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<sup>79</sup> The term "boyfriend" is sensitive and some of my informants prefer to use the word "friend" as a replacement.



Pakistani and Hong Kong cultural values, and the ways Pakistanis interact with one another, especially between parents and children.

## **Implications for the Studies of Transnational Migration**

Nationalism is often examined in the literature on transnational migration. Scholars try to understand how migrants can continue to be nationalistic or participate in politics in their sending countries, for example Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001). However, not all migrants are active in political participation. "Using a transnational lens to understand migration requires letting go of methodological nationalism or the expectation that social life logically and automatically takes place within the nation-state framework" (Levitt 2004). Given that the Pakistani women who have been my informants are not interested in politics, they do not involve themselves in any political organizations in Hong Kong or Pakistan. Most Pakistani migrant women may be nationalistic and consider themselves Pakistanis but this does not mean that they are interested in the news from Pakistan – many informants do not even watch the Pakistani news. Some are not particularly interested in the news about earthquakes or conflict in the Swat Valley. Rather, they may be aware that the land price near the Rawalpindi airport will rise (because they have invested in the properties there) and there are rumors about the end of the world in 2012 (spread online by some Muslims). Thus, some Pakistani women think that they are attached to Pakistan or the Islamic world but they do not get involved in the politics of Pakistan. They are connected transnationally with their relatives in villages only because of their financial interests, family ties and emotional attachments. In terms of the politics of Hong Kong, the Pakistani women I interviewed are also generally unaware the current events. Political issues, such as the political reform in recent

years, have failed to draw the attention of Pakistani women in Hong Kong. Pakistani women usually do not get involved in politics in Pakistan, and most of them are not very well-educated and are politically indifferent. They are too busy with their own lives to take part in any social movements. After all, these political issues do not really affect the lives of Pakistani women directly and these women have little, if any, political influence. They are not represented by any ethnic minority politicians or other ethnic minority-oriented legislative counselors in the legislative council in Hong Kong. The first-generation Pakistani women may see Hong Kong as a place for achieving higher socio-economic status, but not a place for a long-term settlement. Like other Hong Kong Chinese, who are often even more indifferent, Pakistani women are not patriotic toward China even though they have lived in Hong Kong for years or hold Hong Kong SAR passports. When migrants live between two places, one should not assume that they will have much awareness of current events in both places. They can be nationalistic but indifferent to issues that are not relevant to their lives. Despite their transnational lives, they do not participate in the politics of either place nor do they embrace dual national identity. Therefore, in this research, transnational migration is examined in terms of the daily lives and connections with their relatives between host societies and home societies, rather than nationalism.

Transnational migrants and their relatives form a strong kinship network. This network includes migrants (the informants), the migrants' relatives who receive remittances, and the relatives who migrate overseas but not to the same countries as the informants. All three parties are affected by transnational migration. Similarly, the relatives who are left in their home countries may be influenced by the migrants without traveling to the migrants' homes overseas. Some migrants, such as Pakistani women, have taken the initiative in making contributions to their relatives in Pakistan



and improving their lives in Hong Kong. As they communicate with their relatives back home, they also affect their relatives and change their relatives' ways of perceiving migration. Their relatives can see the potential prospects for improving socio-economic status through migration. My informants might influence how their relatives left in Pakistan think about gender relations and religious practices. "Even individuals who have barely left their home villages adopt values and beliefs from afar and belong to organizations that operate transnationally" (Levitt 2004). In addition, migrants often interact with relatives who have also migrated overseas, albeit to a different country. The migrants' network is broad and complicated across different countries. Transnational migrants should therefore be studied through the migrant networks and the interactions between the migrants and those who are left behind, or even between the migrants and other migrants of the same origin in other countries.

When we study transnational migration, we have to be careful if we assume that migrants would naturally embrace two national and cultural identities. Transnational migrants may choose their ways of performance, and degrees of adherence to their cultural values in different situations. My informants have also shown that they selectively choose their sense of belonging to Pakistan and Hong Kong on a periodic and situational basis. The performances of my informants reflect that the dual membership to Pakistan and Hong Kong may be hidden at times, while these identities are very salient at other times. They may live in both Hong Kong and Pakistan but it does not mean that they embrace sense of belonging to both places at all times. We should be aware that migrants and non-migrants may both shift their identities depending on their experiences.

To recap, migrant networks cross national boundaries and include both

migrants and non-migrants. Migrants do not automatically identify themselves as the nationals of their home and host countries. Their situational identities may affect their own lives, and the lives of others in the home and host countries, as well as other countries within the migrants' network.

## **The Roles of Pakistani Women and Racial Harmony**

This thesis has discussed the lives and identities of Pakistani women, which provides a better understanding of these women in Hong Kong. Ultimately, I hope there will be greater racial harmony, especially for fairer treatment toward Pakistani women and other ethnic minority women. These women should not be discriminated against in Hong Kong. Since the racial discrimination bill was passed in Hong Kong in 2008, there has not been much obvious improvement in terms of racial harmony.<sup>80</sup> Understanding between people of different cultures should not be difficult if Hong Kong is a genuinely cosmopolitan global Asian city.

The lives of Pakistani women in Hong Kong are difficult both because of social class and racial issues. The Pakistani women I interviewed in Hong Kong are usually poor, racially discriminated against, and with low social mobility (Ku et al 2003:1). My informants have difficulties in climbing the social ladder in Hong Kong because of their social class and race (O.Tam 2007:194). Pakistanis in Hong Kong are often seen as lower class because Hong Kong Chinese categorize people from developing countries in the lower social rank. Some of my informants think that their

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<sup>80</sup> The racial discrimination bill is "a bill to render discrimination, harassment and vilification, on the ground of race, unlawful; to prohibit serious vilification of persons on that ground; to extend the jurisdiction of the Equal Opportunities Commission to include such unlawful acts; to confer on the Commission the function of eliminating such discrimination, harassment and vilification and promoting equality and harmony between people of different races; to extend unlawful sexual harassment under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance to cover rendering the environment in which a person works, studies or undergoes training sexually hostile or intimidating; to make other consequential and related amendments to enactments; and for related purposes." (Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor 2010)



children have to speak English to climb the social ladder like the foreign expatriates in Hong Kong. Foreign expatriates in Hong Kong are accepted in Hong Kong as the upper social class. As English is a status marker in Hong Kong, the fact that these expatriates speak English also makes them “upper class” in Hong Kong. However, foreign expatriates are seen as upper class not because they speak English. It is because they are the upper rank in the racial hierarchy in the minds of most Hong Kong Chinese. This racial hierarchy is also affected by social class. The socio-economic hierarchy is this: people from economically developed countries and with light skin color are considered as the highest rank in the society while people who come from poorer countries occupy the lowest position. Thus, when Pakistanis want to use the language they speak to climb the social ladder, they fail because it upsets the hierarchy in Hong Kong (O.Tam 2007:194). Thus, even if they speak fluent English, they will still be discriminated against as “non-Hongkongese”. Due to poverty, my informants have difficulties in attaining the higher social status enjoyed by foreign expatriates. Unless my informants are as rich as or much richer than the average Hong Kong Chinese, they cannot enjoy a higher-class status in Hong Kong as Pakistanis. However, sometimes, if Pakistanis were raised in a billionaire family or a foreign expatriate’s family, they might not be discriminated against by mainstream Hong Kong Chinese. This is because their social circle and living environment are different from the majority Hong Kong Chinese. I happened to meet a few Pakistanis who are of the upper class in Hong Kong, but they do not associate themselves with other lower-class Pakistanis in Hong Kong. Thus, Pakistanis in Hong Kong, especially those whom I have interviewed, may be discriminated against by Hong Kong Chinese, and face internal class differentiation among Pakistanis in Hong Kong.

The fundamental problem is the class and racial hierarchy in the minds of both Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistani women. Many of my informants have a racial hierarchy in their minds that is very similar to that of Hong Kong Chinese. They discriminate against mainland Chinese and prefer Western education, food, and political systems. They rank the race of different people with the same standards of most Hong Kong Chinese since the racial hierarchy in the minds of Pakistanis and Hong Kong Chinese is similar. If both Pakistani women and Hong Kong Chinese have such a discriminatory racial hierarchy in their minds, can there be racial harmony in Hong Kong?

Although the problem Pakistanis face is more than racial discrimination, racial harmony is still important for the sustainable development of Hong Kong and the whole world and may partially improve the lives of Pakistani women. By ensuring the social capital and rights of the ethnic minority women, there would be a better way out for these disadvantaged group. Tam (2008) notes that "providing women with instruments of change will help break cycles of poverty and underdevelopment." She also writes that rather than giving them "help", it would be better if these women were aware of their individual rights instead of seeing themselves as part of the family system. It would be helpful for the whole society as well as the ethnic minority's future if these women have sufficient access to education, employment and health care. Not many Pakistanis have settled in Hong Kong permanently and few have advocated individual rights for Pakistani women. Hopefully, with the cooperation of Hong Kong people at large, we can hope to see racial harmony and increasing social capital of Pakistani women.



## **Reflections on My Fieldwork**

After my fieldwork on Pakistani women in Hong Kong, I reflected on the whole process of “intermingling with” these women. It is hard because I am a Christian and a Hong Kong Chinese who does not speak Urdu. I am an outsider to these women. However, it is also very easy to enter their community because very few Hong Kong Chinese would want to make friends with the ethnic minorities, even though Pakistanis welcome Chinese to be their friends. My informants are all very friendly and frank people and we became friends very quickly.

As a Christian, my informants accepted me more than they would on atheist because at least I understand that there is only one “God” in this world. They sometimes asked me to convert to Islam hoping that I can go to heaven. There was thus a tension between me and my informants. Some suggested that I should marry a Pakistani and become even closer to their community. Others said that I should not choose a Pakistani man as my husband because he may not treat his wife well like Hong Kong Chinese men do. As these comments indicated, there is a strong stereotype of “Pakistani men” and “Hong Kong Chinese men”. Older Pakistani women in both Hong Kong and Pakistan who have unmarried sons are often interested in making me their daughter-in-law. I find this very interesting because this implies that they accept me as a Hong Kong Chinese and good young woman. However, I have had to be careful in dealing with these matters for fear that they take the possibility of marriage seriously.

As a female, there are many common topics between Pakistani women and me. My informants talk about sensitive issues in front of me very comfortably. This broke my initial stereotype of Pakistani women as passive or oppressed. Their open discussions of sexuality and trust in me have contributed significantly to my research.

Furthermore, we can discuss issues about marriage, family and life rather easily. However, I was often asked when I will get married because they were worried about it: Once, I told my informant that I met a British woman who speaks fluent Urdu and has a Pakistani boyfriend. My informant immediately said, "Shame on you" in a joking manner. Some of my informants would assume that I should find a good Pakistani man and be able to speak Urdu by now. Most of my informants, however, asked me not to choose Pakistani men because they think that Pakistani men may not respect women and allow them to go out to work after marriage.

I sometimes ask myself if I make friends with these informants to get information or if I genuinely have viewed them as friends. I cannot be an indifferent researcher who simply treats subjects as information providers. But what is the role of an anthropologist in front of informants? To what extent can I help my informants when they are in need? How much can I reward my generous informants, who treat me as friend, rather than an anthropologist? To what extent should I disagree with their practices? Do they treat me as a person who always pries into their private lives? I also wonder if they would agree with me after they read my thesis. In the end, I wonder if there is such a need to strongly pose myself as a researcher or anthropologist. After all, most of my informants may not know what I exactly study or what anthropology is about.

Indeed, there is no way to separate these roles as a friend, a student, a female, a Christian, and an anthropologist. It is hard to reconcile these multiple roles. I often question myself: to what extent should I play my role as a Christian, an anthropologist, a student and a friend? At different times, I highlight myself as a Christian, a young woman, and most of the time I am a student who does anthropological research. I also have the flexibility to shift my identities.



To go further, I ask if a Christian like me can study Pakistani women, who are Muslims, “fairly” and “objectively”. Can one disregard one’s multiple roles in making judgment and showing their views on particular issues? It is very unlikely that a person can do so. It is possible that I have defined “Christian” in a stereotypical way. As there is a strong missionary movement among Hong Kong’s churches, it is hard not for me to think about spreading the gospel to my informants, hoping that they will be “saved”. Often, at this point, I find it hard to convince myself if I am doing the research for my God or for my academic interest. (Should there be such a separation at all?) At times, I find that I set myself within a box where I cannot walk out of it.

Perhaps the problem is whether I can be my true self when I am in front of these Pakistani friends. After all, I find that I can be myself in front of my informants. It would be a big mistake for me to perform too much. (Or perhaps all people perform when they are in front of other people?) I have also long stereotyped Pakistani women as “Muslims” despite the fact that they are all very different. However, their roles as Muslims, women and migrants are so different intrinsically even if these roles interact. I rarely find my informants to be very religious when I am with them. (Neither am I.) All of them pray but I found that it is more an obligation at certain times. Indeed, religion does give them comfort when they feel lonely and helpless at some situations. My informants who have multiple roles cannot clearly separate their Muslim identity from their migrant identity. Within the minds of my informants, there are, no doubt, contradictions between their different roles. In any case it seems quite clear that these women should not be simply thought as ethnic minority women, Muslims and migrants. We cannot put it simply when we try to answer the question, “Who are Pakistani women?”

Pakistani women, especially my key informants, who have many commonalities with me, are very warm and humorous people. This makes me question again, why don't Hong Kong Chinese make friends with them? Why are Pakistani women treated as "others"? Why are Pakistani women treated as inferior ethnic minorities?

We all need to ponder deeply these questions which depict a wall among people of different cultural backgrounds. This thesis has illustrated the dynamics of the transnational lives of Pakistani women between Hong Kong and Pakistan and is complementary to previous research on Pakistani women in Hong Kong and the West. I hope that there will be more understanding of the lives of Pakistani women in Hong Kong and between ethnic groups, which may contribute to the betterment of the social status of ethnic minorities and hence society as a whole. The stereotypes of Pakistani women should be demolished. Pakistani women in Hong Kong, as ethnic minority, women and Muslims, have multiple roles to play in their daily lives and they should not be homogenized. After all, their lives are as complex and multifaceted as those of Hong Kong Chinese.



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